

304 PAGES

Mammoth DETECTIVE

MARCH
25¢

KILLER AFLOAT!
By JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS



304 PAGES

Mammoth DETECTIVE

MARCH

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"Book
RADIO"

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...your job has
...I'll send you
...illustrated book. It
...and photographs of men
...from the many fascinating
...tells how YOU can train
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ONEY



...ok. "Rich
...to plain.")

AGE.....

KILLER

BY JOHN S.



CHILLED? SNEEZING?

LOOK OUT FOR
COLDS AND SORE THROAT



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THANKS

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YES! I'VE GOT A GOOD JOB NOW AND A REAL FUTURE. THANKS TO N.R.I. TRAINING

TOM SAID "NO" HE'S STILL WAITING FOR "LUCK"



BILL'S A SAP TO WASTE HIS TIME STUDYING RADIO AT HOME



SAME OLD GRIND-- SAME SKINNY PAY ENVELOPE-- I'M JUST WHERE I WAS FIVE YEARS AGO

GUESS I'M A FAILURE. LOOKS LIKE I'LL NEVER GET ANYWHERE

YOU'LL ALWAYS BE A FAILURE, TOM. UNLESS YOU DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. WORKING AND WAITING WON'T GET YOU ANYWHERE



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Mammoth DETECTIVE

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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones illustrating a scene from "Killer Afloat"

Back cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones illustrating "I Killed This Man!"

Illustrations by Robert Freary, Ed Gordon, J. Allen St. John, H. W. McCauley, Brady, Robert Gibson Jones, Russell Milburn, Peabie, Swan Studios, Inc., Jay Jackson, William Panak, Rod Ruth, Medill Loebner

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Volume 2
Number 2

OFF THE BLOTTER

YOU aren't the only detective reader who snatched this issue of MAMMOTH DETECTIVE up as though you'd found a long lost brother! According to letters we've received from readers, our new hook, now in its fourth issue, has already become your favorite detective magazine, and we've noticed signs of congestion around local newsstands—readers waiting (and not patiently either!) for this fourth issue to appear.

WELL, we're mighty proud to know that we've managed to put out a hook that is being so well received. And your letters have been telling us why in no uncertain terms. Good stories, you say! Which is exactly what we tried to do.

SPEAKING of good stories, we'll give you a condensed preview of what's in this issue. First, you'll note that we didn't give you a long novel this time. Now this isn't because we are meanies—not by a long shot. We got so much comment on the shorter material, that we decided

to try out a lot of shorter stories this issue, just for variety. Next issue we'll be back with a new novel, and we mean a new one! This one's never been printed before, either here or abroad. In fact, it was written especially for us under our own supervision. We hope we've got something!

THERE are eighteen complete short stories in this issue. Three of them are short novels, so you are getting plenty of long stuff anyway. Then there are several novelets, and plenty of short stories with the kind of sock you liked in our first three issues. We're rather interested in your reaction to this particular issue, and we hope you'll all write in and tell us what you think. You dictate the policy of MAMMOTH DETECTIVE, you know!

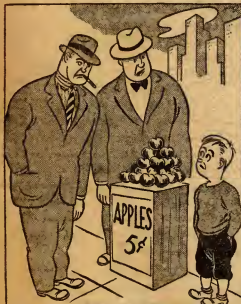
TO LEAD off, our cover story this month is by John Scott Douglas and it's called "Killer Afloat!" We think you'll like this story of a sea-going detective who finds a corpse that leads him straight to a Nazi-caused refugee racket.

OUR other two short novels are "Murder Enroute" by C. S. Wallace, a story about a cross-country bus driver and his very, very strange and deadly passenger; and "Locket for a Lady" by Russell Gray, which is the kind of detective yarn that you dream about. Plenty of thrills and excitement in both, and both written by boys who really know their onions about this mystery racket.

Quite frankly, we don't know a lot of the writers who appear on our contents page this time, so we can't say just what they've done before, and whether or not they are first-timers or have published more stuff than you can shake a stick at. Of course, there's Nelson S. Bond, whom you all know, with a neat little short called "Poison On the Half Shell" (you'll like the twist in this story which reverses the usual mystery insofar as it is a case which is hard *not* to solve).

THERE'S Robert C. Blackmon, who is also one of the boys you are familiar with, hitting the jackpot with "Patrolman Stark Raises a Stink" and boy, if you don't think it's a "smell," pardon us. In the story, we mean, and you'll

(Continued on page 46)



"For fifty bucks a month we protect ya against fire, flood, busted winders an' bombs!"



KNOWLEDGE
THAT HAS
ENDURED WITH THE
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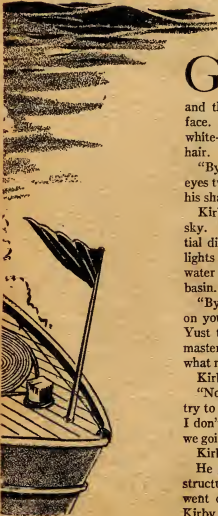


Kirby leaped at his opponent as the cutter's shot whistled over the bow

AFLOAT!

Gus Kirby fished a body out of the ocean and at the same time fished out his own death warrant—only he wouldn't admit it!

By JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS



GUS KIRBY leaned out of the wheelhouse, sniffing the salt-tanged headwind with pleasure. The bow of the little power boat splintered the chops and threw spray back into his square-jawed, bronzed face. Kirby's bright blue eyes were contented, and his white-topped cap was pushed back on his curly black hair.

"By gosh, she sail nice, eh?" Ole Ulvestad's pale-blue eyes twinkled good naturedly under the drooping brim of his shapeless, battered hat.

Kirby nodded. The light had faded from the sunset sky. Off to the east Strickland Park, a private residential district north of Secoma, was marked by sparkling lights among the fir trees at the top of the bluff. A breakwater below the cliff protected several yachts in a yacht basin.

"By gosh, you make no mistake buying my boat to go on your honeymoon. No, by damn, she go anywhere. Yust the same, you're one damn fool. When you got master's papers and can sail boats anywhere in the world, what makes you want to be detective?"

Kirby sobered. "You haven't seen Karen Revell."

"No, by damn, but I seen my old woman. Once she try to make me take yob on the beach. I sock her goot. I don't hear no more talk like that! No, by gosh, how we going to eat if I don't go fishing, eh?"

Kirby grinned. "Time we had our riding lights."

He gripped the hand-rail running top-side the superstructure and worked his way aft. Matches guttered and went out when he tried to light the lantern. Finally Kirby lifted both brass lamps from their cradles, carry-

ing them forward to the wheelhouse. He hung up the port lantern and was fastening the green starboard lantern when a line of glowing phosphorescence caught his eye!

"Hard starboard, Ulvestad!" he cried.

He ran forward as the boat swung sharply. Kirby's big, hard body was tense as silver water curled away from the bow.

"Backwater!"

Two years' absence from the bridge had not robbed Kirby's voice of authority. Ole Ulvestad swore, but obeyed. The power boat shuddered, spreading spume over the choppy seas as it turned slowly. Kirby seized a boat-hook, and ran forward, his eyes intent on the silver-outlined object.

"By damn, what you want of that hair seal?"

Saying nothing, Kirby lashed out with the hook. It failed to hold. Running aft, he tried again. Slowly he drew the object along the lee side of the boat. Over the rail came a grisly object. Cold water had prevented any great amount of decomposition, but barnacles had done things to the hands and face of the corpse. A hole gaped in the gray forehead. When Kirby turned over the body, he saw a dark hole around which yellow hair had straggled. The head was squarish; the body short and stocky, with broad shoulders and large hands.

Ulvestad left the wheel, thrusting his head out. His yellow mustache twitched; his eyes were like oysters.

"By gosh, Captain Kirby, throw that thing overboard! I got plenty trouble without going to yail. Last time I fish out of season—"

"Head for Salmon Bay, Ulvestad."

"I don't want no trouble with my old woman, Captain Kirby," pleaded the old fisherman. "Yust push hard. We

don't say noddin' about it."

"Head for Salmon Bay, do you hear me?"

Ulvestad groaned as he returned to the wheel. Kirby dragged the corpse closer to the wheelhouse for better light. The suit was of coarse-spun material of good quality but oddly cut. A search of the pockets revealed nothing. All were empty. A second search, however, showed a hole in the right-hand pocket. With a pocket-knife, Kirby slit the hem stitching. He found only a small, sodden piece of scratch paper covered with almost indecipherable writing. With difficulty he made out: "*M. S. Hancock, 662 Bancroft Building.*"

"He was murdered," Kirby grimly announced as he joined Ulvestad.

THE glow of the city's lights was reflected from the low-hanging clouds as the *Chinook* chugged into Salmon Bay. A few channel lights illuminated black water that shimmered like quicksilver. Along both shores twinkled the lights of houseboats. Presently Ole Ulvestad drew up to a rickety dock where Kirby had previously arranged mooring privileges. Small fishing schooners and tugs rocked, hawsers creaking, as the old fisherman worked an opening between them for the boat he'd sold Kirby.

Kirby looped a rope around a piling, and then crossed the decks of three boats to a ladder which brought him up to the top of the dock. The small warehouse and office there was dark. Presently the fisherman's shapeless hat appeared above the dock guard.

"By gosh, this is bad business. You still want to report it?"

Kirby nodded. Reluctantly, Ulvestad led the way along the dock and past gangplanks leading down to houseboats. He turned into a frame building plastered with tin beer signs.

Neither the chalky-faced barkeep nor the four fishermen at the bar paid any attention to them.

Kirby walked to a phone and called Sheriff Milo Sheffield. Sheffield, an egg-shaped man with a face like a bloated pig, knew a lot about politics but next to nothing about crime detection. After four unsolved murders in the county had stirred considerable unfavorable publicity, Sheffield had adopted the practice of calling all murders cases of suicide. Two brother sheriffs had even bitterly accused Sheffield of moving corpses across county lines into their jurisdiction to make his record look less black. Kirby's announcement of the "floater" he had discovered and his decided opinion that it was murder and not suicide scarcely made Sheffield happy. Another election was coming around.

Kirby called several newspapers to make certain Sheffield would do his job.

Unable to find M. S. Hancock listed in the phone book, Kirby next called Karen Revell. He pictured her wide-spaced gray eyes lighting as he spoke her name. In his mind's eye, he could see the natural wave of her shoulder-length, midnight hair, contrasting sharply with her fair, lovely face. A tall girl, Karen, with an unshakeable poise and a low voice that had expressive inflections.

"You like the *Chinook*, Skipper? You're going to buy her?"

"I have bought her, Karen. But—I'm going to be a bit late picking you up. We—well, we found a body—"

"*Skipper!* You promised no more cases—"

"I haven't forgotten, Queen! But I have to notify this man's relatives. If I can't be with you in half an hour, I'll call."

"I don't go for feminine intuition, Skipper, but I have a feeling—*Please*

don't touch this! We're to be married in a week—"

"Don't worry, Queen!" he laughed. "Half an hour! That's a promise!"

"Stay moored here until Sheffield comes puffing in under a full head of steam, Ulvestad," Kirby said, as he hung up. "I'll be back to show Karen the boat before long."

Ole Ulvestad nodded gloomily.

KIRBY frowned up at the dusty windows of the Bancroft Building as his cab swung away from the curb. Only one second-story light appeared in the building. Through the streaked windows, he could see an aged hag carelessly waving a feather duster.

He had stopped on his way through town to look at a city directory, still without finding M. S. Hancock. Now he strode across the time-grooved marble of the dark lobby and turned a pen-type flashlight upon a tenant's directory on one wall. No Hancock was listed.

"Maybe he found a better anchorage somewhere else," Kirby thought.

He climbed the stairs. Office 662 was at the end of a rear corridor, but there was no name on the door. Was it vacant? Kirby knocked. The sound inside was not the hollow sound of an unoccupied room. He hesitated, then tried the knob. Surprisingly, the door was unlocked.

Kirby's pulse quickened as he pushed back the door. He saw a desk, filing cabinets and a rug by the pale glimmer coming through two back windows. Through the windows he glimpsed blocks of grubby-topped old buildings to the warehouses crowding the waterfront.

Kirby felt a prickling along his spine as the door slid silently closed. He sensed something as peculiar about this office as all the circumstances connected with it—the corpse with an address in a

coat hem, the absence of a tenant's name on the directory or the office door, no M. S. Hancock in the phone book . . .

"It's too bare," Kirby realized suddenly. "No papers on Quills' desk nor in the she-yeoman's basket, either."

He swept the flashlight beam over the carpet. It was a new carpet, showing wear only around a desk in the middle of the office. A large safe was set in one wall, apparently installed years before. A large desk stood in the corner, but when Kirby walked over to it, the sheen of the carpet near it was like new. Nor did the chair behind the large desk look as if it had ever been used.

Kirby began a swift exploration of the office, only to make a startling discovery. There was not an object of any kind in the large desk or in either of the filing cabinets. Rolling out the typewriter in the stenographer's desk next, he found the platen almost new. In that desk were some nearly-full boxes of stationery and envelopes, but neither had letterheads. In the bottom drawer was a partially-eaten bar of chocolate, some film magazines, a light-colored carmine lipstick and a comb with two short, ash-blond hairs clinging to it.

There was no time to learn more. His breath caught short as he heard the door opening. He whirled. His flashlight picked out a girl who stood framed in the partially-opened doorway.

IN ONE hand the girl held what appeared to be a .32 pistol; it pointed at his chest. In the hand holding the door open were two plain, low-heeled walking shoes. Kirby's first thought was that it was the girl whose desk he had been searching. Instantly he saw his mistake.

This girl's hair was yellow, not platinum. No cosmetics relieved the pale-

ness of her cheeks or helped dispel the drabness of her plain tailored suit. Kirby's confidence ebbed back as he saw that the pale, frightened blue eyes staring at him weren't those of a forceful character.

The second finger of the girl's right hand tightened. Sweat broke out on Kirby's body. He'd seen timid people do things when they felt crowded. There was steel beneath the apparently forceless exterior.

"Come aboard," said Kirby. "Perhaps we can talk this over."

Seemingly scared speechless, she stepped inside.

"Go over there. Sit on dot corner desk. Goot! If you turn out dot flashlight, I shoot." She spoke clearly, but with a slight Dutch accent. "You're the man who rents this office? The man Hancock?"

"If I'm not, what does that make me?"

She did not smile. "You are Hancock. My brother came here ten days ago to see you. Like this, at night."

"Why at night?"

"You are never here during the day. This Pearl Loring you employ, she never knows where to find you. She always say, 'Leave a message.'"

"What becomes of the messages?"

"I do not know. But I come here many times every day, these last ten days, looking for you. These last two nights, too, I have waited in the hall. I think maybe you come at night for your mail and messages."

"I see," said Kirby. "And what is my business supposed to be?"

"A most rotten business dot cheats old women like my mudder!" Her glance was contemptuous. "But dot is not why I am here. What have you done to my brudder?"

"You've made a mistake. I'm not Hancock."

"So?" Something stirred in the pale eyes that made Kirby uneasy. He looked her straight in the eye. "I'm Gus Kirby—a former sea captain who now has his own detective agency."

"Ha! You expect me to believe dot? Mr. Hancock, I am worried sick. My patience, it is all gone. I think you have killed Peter. I know you have taken our money." His throat went dry as she raised the weapon. "Mr. Hancock, if you do not tell me where my brudder—"

"Give me a broadside, and you'll learn nothing! . . . Did your brother have yellow hair? Was he stocky? Did he wear a suit of coarse blue material?"

"Yes, yes, yes! You have seen him! I knew you were Hancock!"

Kirby gauged the distance to the pistol. Catching the look, she stepped back.

"So? You won't tell me what you've done to Peter?"

Kirby said patiently: "I am not Hancock! But I think I know where your brother is. I was sailing down Puget Sound tonight—"

"Never mind dot! . . . *Is he alive?*"

He thought she was going to drop the gun. He braced himself to spring. Suddenly she caught herself. The pale lips compressed.

"So?" she said, her voice strangely calm. "You killed Peter?"

"No," said Kirby.

But his words weren't reaching her. Her pale eyes were glazing. She was something more than a white-faced girl now. She was dangerous.

GUS KIRBY didn't see anyone enter the office, yet vaguely he sensed that a man was there, though he couldn't wrench his eyes from the gun.

"I wouldn't," said the man. "Not in here."

A shout at that moment might have startled the girl into firing. That calm, well-bred voice had the reverse effect. Shoes dropped from the girl's nerveless left hand; her eyes began to focus.

"Drop that gun!"

The girl obeyed like a trained dog.

Kirby sucked air into famished lungs. In the darkened room, he distinguished only a tall, black-bearded figure and eyes that met his coldly. There was an automatic in the man's hand.

"I could shoot you both," he said, "for breaking into my office."

"You are Hancock!" the girl whispered. "The one who murdered Peter."

From where they sat, Kirby could see that wasn't a bright remark. The bearded man's face was inscrutable, but his eyes went cold as ice.

"I place the lady, but where do you come into this, sir?"

"You wouldn't know me."

"You should have stayed on the bridge of a ship, Captain Kirby."

Kirby's eyebrow climbed. It always astonished him how well known he was in Secoma. But it wasn't really surprising. He'd been making headlines even before he started breaking cases that baffled the police and the sheriff's office. There was the time he'd towed in a Chinese junk he'd found adrift—a junk with not a person alive and scraped human bones clearly showing signs of cannibalism. And the time he'd rescued all the inhabitants of an Olympic Peninsula town threatened by a forest fire, taking the refugees off with lifeboats.

Odd that with Hancock's gun pointing at his heart that he should be thinking of those things. Maybe, Kirby thought, that was the way a man's brain raced when he faced death.

He remembered the tall, beautiful girl who had come to the dock to see the forest-fire refugees arrive. She had

asked him questions and he had gone overboard for her at her first smile. She told him that her father had been a sea captain. That had brought them together . . . and almost separated them. She remembered too well her mother's life . . . the wondering, worrying, waiting, the uncertainty of having a man at sea.

"If you could stick to the beach, I'd marry you in a minute, Skipper."

Kirby remembered how he had gone to talk it over with old Mike Thrasher, who had retired from Naval Intelligence to open a detective agency. Thrasher's heart had never left the sea, and when he wasn't working on a case, he could be found on his small yacht. There Kirby found him.

"I know the sea," Thrasher had said, "and I've known Karen Revell since she had pig-tails. You'll lose either way. You won't find a girl like Karen twice in a lifetime. But there are substitutes for salt water."

Thrasher leaned back in a deck chair, waving an indulgent hand at yachts in the basin. "Sissy sailing for us, Kirby, but it helps you forget."

Before Kirby had left, Thrasher said, "If Karen should win, drop into my office. I could use a partner."

That was how Kirby had become a detective. He had the benefit of Thrasher's years of experience in Naval Intelligence, but he had the flair too. Luck had helped him with his first cases while he was learning the ropes; they hinged on his knowledge of the sea.

When Thrasher had died two months before, he had left the agency to Kirby. And in a few minutes, Kirby realized, he might be leaving the agency to old Mike Thrasher's jitterbug son!

Hancock's eyes had that look!

"I'd prefer to take it over my bowsprit," said Kirby. "And you seem to have forgotten that the janitress downstairs can phone."

"Wrong, Captain. She's stone deaf. What's more, I'd give you a hundred dollars for every policeman you could find within five blocks of here."

Kirby knew the answer to that. Angrily, he faced the wall. But he watched Hancock narrowly. He hoped the bearded man would overlook the .32 on the floor. He picked it up, however, on his way to the wall safe.

Keeping them covered with his automatic, he twirled a dial and swung open the doors to reveal an aperture large enough to admit a man. Hancock removed a thin packet of letters, and swung the doors closed. Kirby had a glimpse of foreign stamps as Hancock pocketed the envelopes.

A moment later the gun pressed Kirby's spine. "Hands up, Captain Kirby. And you, Anna—I've forgotten your last name—don't move."

Very thoroughly, Hancock stripped Kirby's pockets. He didn't search Anna, but he removed a small, hand purse from her pocket, emptied it, opened the window, and dropped the empty purse to the alley below.

"I assume my secretary carelessly left the door unlocked," Hancock said testily. "Anna, put on your shoes. Now stand beside Kirby." He placed the automatic against Kirby's back again. "Walk—don't run!"

The girl's eyes were miserable. "Why are you going to kill us?"

"There's such a thing as knowing too much."

With the gun pressed against his back, Kirby followed Anna to the door. Hancock's gun probed at his back as he walked down the stairs and passed through the lobby to the sidewalk. Desperately, Kirby scanned the dark, de-

HANCOCK said icily, "Both of you face the wall and stay that way."

served street. Not even a cruising cab!

Hancock ordered them inside a black sedan waiting at the curb, and dropped between them.

The driver was built like a Jersey bull. Shadow obscured his heavy features. A cap with ear-flaps made him look like a New England farmer; his coat collar was turned up. After the briefest glance, he slouched behind the wheel.

"They were searching the office," Hancock explained. "They know about the Dutchman. Drive north. Avoid arterials when you can."

THE driver managed that nicely, turning downhill to follow a cable-car track. He turned north on Water-front Avenue, fleeing past the smoky-fronted warehouses and lines of freight cars.

Kirby hoped that a string of box-cars might be drawn across their path or that a police car might stop them. Warehouses and docks vanished presently, however, and they were on open boulevard. They sped through another industrial district, past lumber, and shingle-mills, and then were on open highway—a broad concrete ribbon running between logged-off fields.

"Turn right at the next road," said Hancock.

Tires shrieking, they swung onto a narrow, twisting macadam highway. Hancock kept the automatic pressed against Kirby's side. Kirby knew it was not far to the spot the newspapers would mark X.

Once Anna flashed him a mute appeal. His eyes signalled understanding. Given a chance, he'd do what he could. Despite her frail appearance, the girl's help was not to be despised.

Prepared though he was, the chance came sooner than Kirby expected. Swinging around a curve, Hancock

moved the gun to regain his balance. Anna clutched the barrel, wrenching to give Kirby his chance.

He got a precarious hold on the gun, pushing to draw Hancock's arms forward. Hancock groaned as Kirby's left elbow smashed against his ribs. The automatic exploded deafeningly, starting the windshield.

For a moment, he thought he had the gun. But with Anna and Hancock struggling to retain their holds, he couldn't get a firm grasp.

The driver was meanwhile steering wildly, skirting the edge of an embankment as he groped in his pocket for a weapon.

Kirby pushed the gun barrel toward the floorboards by sheer strength, and twisted around half on top of Hancock to hold him down. He swung his leg over the back of the front seat; his kick grazed the driver's skull.

Things happened fast after that. Kirby had a sickening glimpse of space beyond the car's nose as it plunged over the embankment. Releasing the gun, he cushioned the girl's head against his body and pulled her to the floor. Stars flew around wildly. Every staggering impact sent Kirby's senses spinning through a black abyss. The door of the car against which he braced flew open, screeching as it was ripped off. The branches of a tree thrashed as the car flattened it to earth.

KIRBY was paralyzed when the machine finally stopped rolling. Dimly he realized that the car lay on its side. He was head down, and the Dutch girl lay limply on top of him. He was too shaken up to unscramble himself for several minutes.

Realizing that the car might yet explode, he finally forced himself to move. Weight shifted on top of him; a shoe bearing down on his right wrist awoke

screaming pain. Kirby straightened around in time to see a figure silhouetted against the gaping door frame. He grabbed at an ankle swinging upward, but missed. Hancock dropped to the ground.

Kirby guessed that Hancock must be badly dazed himself. If he still had the pistol, he could have shot them before leaving the car.

The driver's door was missing, too. There was no sign of the stocky man. Apparently he had fallen out or jumped from the rolling car.

Sore and bruised, Kirby freed himself of the girl's encumbering weight, and stood up. Hancock was staggering up the embankment.

When Kirby gently lifted the girl, he found she had a death grip on the barrel of the automatic. No wonder Hancock had been anxious to leave!

He dropped the girl to the ground. A shot pinged from the metal of the car as he started to crawl out. He ducked, then raised his head again.

It was Hancock firing, although he must still have Anna's .32. He was clambering the final few feet up the embankment. Above him a gun flashed, and the report echoed across the valley. Kirby got his head down once more. Bullets ricocheted from metal or crunched through the floorboards.

Kirby counted the shots. Six . . . seven! A full clip and one in the chamber! Swinging through the opening before the driver could reload, he slid down the turret top to join the girl.

Prying the automatic from her fingers, he straightened, firing at the two figures now standing on the road. They broke into a run, vanishing behind a clump of trees. Kirby snapped out several more shots, but could hear no sounds beyond the trees to indicate that he'd struck either man.

Risking an ambush, he scrambled up

the bank and walked half a mile down the road. But he neither drew a shot nor heard any sounds. The girl was staring forlornly at her torn dress when Kirby returned to the car.

"Hurt?" he asked.

She shook her yellow-blond head. "Just shaky."

"You haven't told me your name, shipmate."

"Just leave it at Anna," she said.

"If you don't want me to know your name because you're thinking of boarding Hancock again, take my advice: *Leave him alone!*"

She shuddered. Her pale eyes were frightened but determined.

"How long have you been in the United States?"

She glanced up quickly. "My brother and I came over five years ago."

"How about your mother?"

"She's never been in America. She sailed from Holland to Mexico."

"Mexico! Then where does Hancock come in?"

She was silent.

"Listen, Anna. I'm trying to help you. What was Hancock trying to do for your brother and your mother?"

She looked at him quickly, and then away.

"Why did he kill your brother?"

"Perhaps he had to . . . or go to jail."

"What did you mean saying Hancock preyed on old women?"

"Not necessarily old women. *Unfortunates!*" Her pale eyes flashed. "I will tell you no more. Already you know too much."

AS ANNA staggered unsteadily toward the embankment, Kirby remembered his promise to call Karen within half an hour if he could not be at her apartment. It was three miles to the nearest open service station,

however; and, though the service man allowed him to use the phone after Kirby had explained the reason for his penniless condition, the line was busy. Dora Cogswell, Karen's scatterbrained roommate, had a reputation for clinging to a phone as a drowning man clings to a piece of driftwood.

A passing truck driver listened to their story, and drove them to the morgue. Anna shrank back when she saw her brother's body, nodded dumbly, and turned away, her face chalk-white but determined.

Sheriff Milo Sheffield was talking to the medical examiner when Kirby and the girl entered the morgue office. Kirby tried to reach Karen by phone again, but the line was still busy.

The egg-shaped sheriff pushed his broad-brimmed black politician's hat back from his red, blobby face and regarded Kirby with small, mean eyes. "Did you have to tip off the papers that it was a murder before I'd had a chance to look at the stiff?" he asked sullenly.

"You might have some consideration for the sister of the deceased man," Kirby snapped. "Anna's been through plenty tonight."

Sheffield swept off his hat. "I didn't mean no harm. I'm a rough but kindly man, Miss. As a matter of record, what was your brother's name?"

She viewed him with distaste. "Peter . . . *Smith*, will do."

Sheffield's small eyes went ugly. "Now, see here, you—"

"As a matter of record," Kirby said bleakly, "I'm going to give myself the pleasure of scraping the barnacles off your hull some day, Sheffield. I'll explain why *Peter Smith* was murdered." Briefly, he described the events at the Bancroft Building and the wild ride which had followed. He failed to mention Anna's gun.

"Hmmm," muttered Sheffield. "Get the license number of that car?"

Kirby gave it to him, but added, "I'll lay you odds it's in Hancock's name, and the address is Bancroft Building. That won't get you anywhere; there's no M. S. Hancock in the city directory."

After the girl had given some non-committal answers to Sheffield's questions, they left the morgue. The girl held out her hand.

"Thank you for everything, Captain Kirby."

"Not so fast. I borrowed five bucks to take you home." As she started to protest, he added, "Let's not argue."

The cab he'd ordered drew up to the curb, and the girl stepped in.

"The University Bridge," she said.

The driver looked at her, then at Kirby.

"We're planning to jump off the bridge," said Kirby.

"A funny guy, eh?" Sulkily, the driver started the car.

"You might as well give your right address," Kirby said; "I'm going along for the cruise. Have you forgotten that Hancock took your papers and knows where you live?"

THE girl said nothing until the cab reached the University Bridge. Then she said, "Keep driving north."

They stopped for a red light at the next main intersection. When the blinker changed, the girl grasped the door handle, swung out of the moving cab, and slammed the door. Ducking between moving cars, she opened the door of a cab which stood on the intersecting street.

Kirby's driver sped forward. Kirby yelled at him to stop.

The driver waved a hand tattooed with a mermaid as he speeded up. "That dame don't want you making no

passes at her, Mister."

"Stow it, Gob! Stop beating your gums and let go your hook. I'm trying to keep that sea gull from being overhauled by a guy who uses bullets instead of bouquets."

The driver turned around, his jaw gaping. "How'd you know I'd been in the Navy? Why didn't you say you were a salt-water man?"

He twisted the wheel, narrowly missing a car in the opposite lane. The light had changed, but the driver took the red blinker with shrilling tires. The girl's cab, however, had vanished.

"Try straight ahead," Kirby cried. "If we don't see her cab from the top of this hill, try either right or left."

But it was no use. Within fifteen minutes, Kirby had to admit the other cab had successfully eluded them. He jumped out at the next drug store and called Karen's number again.

"That you, Dora? Karen there?"

"No. She grew worried and went to your apartment, Captain."

Kirby hung up, and rang his own number. The phone kept ringing. Months before Karen had offered to type up his reports when work was pressing, and he had given her a key to his apartment. Now a chill crept into Kirby's blood as he hung up, and strode swiftly out to the waiting cab.

"Harrison Apartments on Spring and Palmer. Chop-chop, shipmate!"

The driver shifted rapidly into high. "If anyone tries to pass us astern, they'll know they been in heavy seas. You find out where that dame we lost lives?"

"No," said Kirby tersely. "This is another girl."

"Wotta man!" said the driver admiringly. "Two in every port!"

GUS KIRBY told himself, as he sprinted up the stairs of his apart-

ment house, that there was no cause for worry. The events of the evening, however, didn't make for peace of mind. Hancock had taken his papers and knew where he lived. And Hancock knew that his life was in danger while Kirby lived.

He found his hand shaking as he unlocked his door. He was half-prepared for the sight of a long, slender body lying on his bed; for a lovely face as cold as marble in death. Although there was no body on the bed, Kirby's relief was short.

Hancock's gun was steady in Kirby's hand as he kicked back the door all the way, but his heart was pounding in slow, jerky beats. A lamp lay smashed on the floor, and books were strewn over the taupe carpet.

He switched on the light. What had been a comfortable apartment that morning was now a scene of confusion. The bed was pushed out of line. The small bookcase lay on its side. And a big Morris chair had been pushed over.

Only the desk in the corner and the ornaments on the fireplace mantel were undisturbed. Stunned, Kirby walked slowly across the room, drawn by a sheet of paper in the typewriter on his desk. His eyes felt hot and dry as he read:

"Dear Gus—

Don't report that I am missing or you will never see me alive again.

Karen."

Even the signature was typed, but Kirby knew why. Karen had never written that letter; she called him Skipper, not Gus.

His throat was tight as he glanced around the room. He saw the corner of something black under the bed. Numbed, he picked it up. It was a purse with K. R. in big, gold letters on the outside. Opening it, he found a compact and a deep red lipstick which

went so well with Karen's vivid coloring. Exploring further, he found her calling cards, a pair of gloves, some currency and change. Also a small, slim package which he opened on the chance it might reveal something. It did . . . but it was not a clue. It was a gold pencil engraved with his name. Probably intended as a wedding present. It gave Kirby a queer twinge to find it.

LOOKING around the disordered room, he tried to reconstruct the scene. Karen had waited there; the book she had been reading was on the desk. She'd heard steps on the stairs and run to open the door. A man had come in.

What man? Hancock?

Anyway, there'd been a damned spirited fight, judging by the signs of Karen's resistance. And after that? Was she carried away unconscious?

Kirby walked lead-footedly to the desk, lifting the phone from its cradle. Then he replaced it, more at a loss than he'd ever been on the bridge of a ship in a typhoon off the China Coast. That note in the typewriter might mean what it said: Reporting Karen's disappearance might cost Karen her life?

"Easy to tell the other fellow to report a kidnapping immediately," Kirby muttered bleakly. "But when you get such a threat—"

Torn with indecision, he awakened the man next door. His neighbor had heard sounds but had thought Kirby was merely rearranging his furniture. He had heard no screams.

No screams! Kirby thought soberly as he returned to his own rooms. That was characteristic. Karen hadn't screamed the time a drunk had crashed into his car, either. Maybe that was the result of making several voyages aboard her father's ships when she was

a kid. Captain Severn Revell hated any signs of weakness.

"Karen got the pay-off meant for me," Kirby thought bitterly.

He wished now that he'd let Sheriff Sheffield bully the Dutch girl into revealing her name and address. For Anna was the only trail which might lead to Hancock until Hancock's office in the Bancroft Building opened in the morning.

PASSING through the revolving door of the Cascade Building the next morning, Kirby was struck so hard behind by the next panel that his new Homburg was knocked off. He trampled it shapeless regaining his balance.

The violent pusher was a tall, slender youth with blond hair, remarkably like the type appearing in collar ads. A dented hat was pushed back on his yellow head. He regarded Kirby calmly, then picked up the Homburg, and would have put the grimy wreckage on the ex-sea-captain's head if Kirby hadn't snatched it from Tony Thrasher's hand.

Among Kirby's many reasons for regretting the death of his partner, the most persistent one was that loyalty to old Mike Thrasher demanded that he give Tony Thrasher a chance in the agency his father had built up.

"Sorry," said Thrasher blithely. "Don't know my own strength the morning after I've been rug-cutting." Blissfully ignoring passing office workers, he executed a tricky dance step. "Catchy, isn't it? A babe taught me that one last night."

"I came in to see if anyone might have called the office, but I might have known you'd be late," Kirby exploded. "Get upstairs and moor yourself to the phone! Why I keep you—"

"Personality," said Tony Thrasher calmly.

He went off saying, "*Shoo! shoo! shoo!*" He followed it by an ecstatic high-pitched whistle that he had once told Kirby jitterbugs emitted when musicians were "in the groove."

Kirby passed through the revolving doors, and went into the Cascade Hat Shop next door. Grimly he tossed down the wrecked hat.

"Another Homburg, seven and three-quarters, Duval."

The sleek, dark clerk said, "*Tch! tch!* An accident, Captain Kirby?"

While he was waiting, Kirby picked up a phone and called his office.

"Well, sweetheart?" a languid voice finally answered.

"Does it take all day to answer the phone!" Kirby thundered.

"Take it easy, Cap'n," Thrasher answered. "I was sorting your mail."

"What mail?" Kirby asked tersely.

"Only two bills came this morning."

"Don't take all morning sorting them!" Kirby violently slammed the phone, and donned the hat the clerk had brought him. "Put it on my bill, Duval," he said, and stalked out.

ON HIS way to the Bancroft Building, Kirby had to pass the building in which Karen worked. He turned in there, taking an elevator to the eighth floor. Gold leaf on the door read:

*Harlington and Massee Importers
& Exporters*

A quiver passed through Kirby's square-hewn face as he entered. His eyes shot to the desk in the front office. Something went heavy in him; Karen was not there.

The front office was separated from two beyond by a panel. Both doors were open, but Ross Massee was not in the left-side office. A tall, loose-jointed man with a trim silver mustache and wearing a well-tailored gray Scotch tweed was working at a desk. His hag-

gard, gaunt face broke into a smile when he saw Kirby.

"You're a bit early, Captain," he said, extending his hand. "Miss Revell seems to be a bit late. Pardon my gloves; I was just stepping out."

Kirby's face was grim. "Karen won't be in today."

He told Karen's employer what had happened at his apartment.

"What are the police doing, Captain? Surely you've informed them."

"No," said Kirby; and he explained about the note.

Harlington pursed his lips. "I don't know what to advise."

Kirby donned his hat. "I thought I'd better tell you, Mr. Harlington."

"Wait." Harlington walked into the inner office and picked up his hat. "I'll go down with you. This is a great shock to me, Captain Kirby. Why, only yesterday I offered Miss Revell a substantial raise if she'd remain with us after her marriage. We'll feel lost without her."

"She's not going to work after we're married."

"Valuable girl. Intelligent; quick. Indispensable during rush times." He opened the door, and Kirby walked ahead, punching the elevator bell. "Of course, our business is very quiet—the war and all."

Kirby glanced at Harlington: "Can you get any shipments through from Europe?"

"Occasionally. Lisbon, Portugal, is still open."

After the elevator had taken them down, Harlington extended his hand. "Leave you here. Going to get a shave." A twinge of pain passed over his face. "Anything I can do for you, Captain, please let me know."

KIRBY opened the door of 662 Bancroft Building, the same office

from which Hancock had escorted him at the point of a gun the previous night. A pretty blonde young woman sitting at the desk stopped chewing gum, her too-red lips parted in surprise. Her light blue eyes were rather blank; her hair was done in the upside-down style that reminded Kirby of a bird's nest.

"Oh, hello," she said.

"I want to find Mr. Hancock."

"He's not in. Would you leave your name?"

"What good would that do? When will he be in?"

"I don't know. He was in last night because he got some letters I put in the safe at five o'clock."

Kirby glanced at the wall safe. It was locked.

"Do you often put letters there for Mr. Hancock?"

"Sure; that's my job. But what's it to you?"

"You'd be surprised," said Kirby grimly. "What's your name?"

"Pearl Loring." She resumed chewing her gum. "What's yours?" When he told her, she smiled archly. "Gus ain't a very romantic name. But you're a kinda cute fella. I bet you ain't forty yet. Are you?"

Kirby choked. "This isn't a social call, Miss Loring. I want to find Hancock, and I want to find him damned quick."

"No can do," she smiled. "Do you date much, Big Boy?"

"You must be able to reach Hancock! When did you last see him?"

"I never seen him."

"The old run-around," said Kirby dryly. "Do you expect me to believe you've never seen your boss?"

"That's right," she said brightly.

"Ain't that cockeyed, Gus?"

"More and more comical!"

"It's true," she said indignantly.

"There was a kinda funny ad in the

paper. It said to send in a picture with a letter of application to a post-office box. My girl friend, Belle, she said to lay off—it looked to her like a racket. But what harm could sending in my picture do?"

"A couple days later I got the funniest letter from Hancock. It said I'd been hired. Fifty smackers a week, can y' imagine? He said he'd be out of town but he wanted me to go right to work. He asked me to rent an office in the Bancroft Building. A back office, he said. I was to furnish the office and send the bills and the lease to him at the post-office box and he'd pay the bills and sign the lease and return it to the building manager with the first month's rental.

"Belle said, 'Pearl, it's whacky. It don't sound right.'

"But two hundred berries-plus every thirty days ain't chicken feed!"

"The building manager thought it was kinda screwy, too. It ain't no picnic renting space in these old buildings, though, so finally he said yes. But the manager puts in a clause in the lease that if it was anything illegal, the lease was N. G. . . . You know, I like your taste in ties. You can tell a fella—"

"**A**RE you making this up as you go along?" Kirby asked incredulously.

"No. All my friends say it's a scream. Working for someone I never seen, I mean. But I guess it's all right. Hancock's good pay."

"So you're paid regularly?"

"Well, pretty regular. I find fifty smackers in folding money in an envelope in the safe, with a receipt for me to sign. Sometimes my pay is a day or so late when Hancock don't come for his mail. . . . But I shouldn't be telling you all this stuff!"

"Listen, Loring, didn't it ever occur

to you to come here at night to see what your boss looked like?"

"Sure it did. But in one of his letters, he said that if I did, I'd be out of a job. Am I dumb enough to kick fifty bucks a week in the puss?"

"What is your work?" Kirby asked.

"Just collecting his mail and putting it in the safe. It's mostly from Mexico and Guatemala and Panama and places like that. And there were letters for a time from a Dutchman here in Secoma—the one who raised such a howl about being robbed. It's a soft job. I mustn't even open the mail. I can take two hours off for lunch, if I want. But it gets kinda lonesome."

"Let's see one of those letters," said Kirby.

"And get me canned? But I wish I could. Sometimes they're a riot—fat letters with foreign writing, and lotsa words misspelled."

"Why was this Dutchman sore?" Kirby laid his hat on the desk and sat down.

"Oh, he squawked about four hundred bucks he claimed Hancock chiseled him out of. He wouldn't tell me much. But I don't think a guy who pays a girl fifty a week would slicker no one out of money, do you? I got kinda scared, though, when this Dutchman threatened to go to the police if Hancock didn't make good. But I guess my boss squared things, because the Dutchman ain't been back for a couple weeks, nearly."

"What was he like?"

"Oh, kinda stocky and solid lookin', with yellowish hair and very blue eyes. About thirty, I guess. Serious; the washout-of-the-party type. He kept telling me about how his old lady wanted to get into the U. S. A."

"What was his name?" Kirby asked tersely.

"Peter—" She laughed. "Now ain't

that comical? I wrote down his name and address about a dozen times for Mr. Hancock and now I forget it."

"What was his sister's name? Maybe that would help."

"Anne? No; *Anna!* And it seems like the last name was Van—Van Puel—Van Vort— No; I got it! Vandervort—Peter Vandervort!"

She drew a fountain pen from a desk holder, and picked up a blank sheet of paper. "Maybe if I write it down the address will come to me."

She scratched, but no ink flowed. She shook the pen vigorously. A big blob suddenly splattered Kirby's new Homburg.

"Oh, if I don't do the silliest things!" she giggled. "Now if me and you go out on a date tonight, you'll have to buy a new hat."

Kirby regarded the ruined hat with hot eyes. "Go on—*write!* You owe me something for this overhead. What's the address?"

Pearl Loring wrote Peter Vandervort, and then nibbled the pen thoughtfully. It was a long time before she added 998 Juan de Fuca Avenue.

Kirby strode out with the slip, his ruined Homburg pulled down almost to his angry eyes.

HE HAILED a cruising cab. The driver's mouth parted.

"Never mind my hat," Kirby growled. "Drive me to the Cascade Building."

"You don't need to get sore," said the driver in an aggrieved tone; and he said nothing more for several minutes as he whipped corners in a way designed to make Kirby uncomfortable. "Ain't in no trouble, are you?"

"What do you mean?"

"A short, stocky guy watched you get into my bus. He was parked in front of the Bancroft Building. His coupe's

been followin' whichever way I turn."

"Get a look at his face?"

"Not a good one. Hat brim pulled down. But he had a jaw you could crack nuts with and no neck to speak of."

Had Pearl Loring tipped off a confederate? Or was there a dictaphone hidden in the office?

Kirby moved to the right side of the seat so that he could not be seen by anyone in a pursuing car. He rolled up a five-dollar bill which was part of a check cashed that morning, and flipped it into the front seat.

"Whip the Cascade Building corner if the light's with us. Slow down after your turn so that I can jump out. Then keep going!"

"Okay, Boss. I got you."

The light turned green as they approached it. The cab speeded up, rounded the corner, and squealed to a stop. Kirby stepped out, and slammed the door. He slipped between two parked cars as the driver went on.

To his exasperation, the next car around the corner was driven by two subdebs. The girl driving slowed down just as the car which had been following his cab rounded the corner, preventing Kirby from seeing the driver. The subdebs' car moved along slowly, finally stopping directly in front of him. The coupe flew past. The driver must have seen Kirby because he kept his head turned away.

All Kirby could get was a stern view. From the rear the stocky man looked like the one who had taken Anna Vandervort and himself for a ride the previous night. Kirby cursed his luck. No cab came until the coupe was out of sight.

THE detective stalked into the Cascade Hat Shop. Duval came forward smiling happily, his eyes above the

level of Kirby's. He rubbed his hands.

"Well, well! Another accident? I'm afraid we're out of Homburgs your size, Captain Kirby."

"I want a dark hat," growled Kirby. "Something that won't show ink."

Kirby scowlingly tried on a dark-blue hat with a snap-down brim.

"I hope I don't meet anyone I know," he muttered.

He paused before his office door a minute later. A languid voice drifted through the open transom:

"Not that corny dive, Glamorpuss. I'm the Big Time Operator—Tony Thrasher himself. How about squirming to Manny Burke's orchestra at the Spanish Gardens this p.m.? Those supermen know how to give. Okey-doke, be round in my puddlejumper at eight, Potent Stuff."

Tony Thrasher was leaning back, feet on the desk, when Kirby opened the door. He considered kicking them off, but Thrasher calmly lowered them.

"Not that I would interfere with your social life for the world, Hot Stuff," Kirby said dryly; "but how in hell can anyone contact this packet while you're jamming the air?"

"I thought it was your call," Thrasher said virtuously.

Growling, Kirby stormed into his office and flung his hat on the chair. He called Karen's apartment. No answer. He called Dora Cogswell where she worked but she had not heard from her roommate. Again he tried Karen's office. Harlington's voice answered, "Miss Revell is not here today."

"Thrasher, come here."

Tony Thrasher came and sat down. With a roar, Kirby sprang up and tipped the chair, to send his annoying assistant crashing to the floor. He picked up the blue hat Thrasher had sat on and regarded it with pained eyes. It now looked like the kind of a hat

worn by aged hoboes.

Thrasher rose, looking injured. "I would have got up if you'd give me time, Cap'n. Anyhow, that wasn't such a hot wing-ding."

Kirby's fist ached. He had to remind himself that this was Mike Thrasher's only son and should be allowed to live for old Mike's sake.

"Thrasher," Kirby said. "A blonde named Pearl Loring works at 662 Bancroft Building. Shadow her! If anyone calls at that office, I want a good description. Report back here if you learn anything."

"How long you want me to shadow this blonde? I got a date tonight."

"I'll say you have!" Kirby exploded. "Keep right on Loring's trail!"

With his hat on the back of his taffy-hued head, Tony Thrasher went out making a sound with his lips like an engine coming into a station.

THE clerk beamed when Kirby entered the Cascade Hat Shop.

"No," Kirby anticipated him. "I didn't have an accident! I needed something to prop up the window."

Duval bowed slightly. "We're getting a bit low on your size, Captain."

Kirby shuddered when a fedora was brought out. "Not a fur-bearing hat, Duval. Just something that will absorb ink and crush easy under foot."

"Quite so," said Duval gravely. He brought out three other hats. "We've had a run on your size this morning, Captain."

Picking out the least painful hat, Kirby stalked out.

He hailed a cruiser and gave the driver the Juan de Fuca Avenue address. Several times the driver turned around to stare at Kirby.

"What you gawking at?" Kirby finally exploded. Removing the hat, he regarded it sourly. "I paid seven bucks

for this overhead."

"It's your money, Boss. But if that's what they're wearing this year, I'm hanging onto my old benny."

Muttering, Kirby rammed the offending headgear on his head and slumped morosely in his seat.

THE old, gingerbreaded gray mansion in which Peter and Anna Vandervort had found lodgings had been converted into an apartment house of sorts. There were a series of mail boxes at the front and one had a hand-printed card reading: *Peter Vandervort*, and, below it, *Anna Vandervort*.

There was no lock on the door. Kirby walked up a rickety stairs covered with a threadbare carpet. A dark hall led to the back of the large old house. He followed it, peering at the numbers.

At Apartment 6, he knocked and waited. The silence made him distinctly uneasy. After glancing right and left along the empty hallway, he swiftly took a ring of skeleton keys he had brought from his office, and selected one. The lock would not turn. Kirby found a stub of candle in his pocket, lit it and dripped wax on the key. He tried it again very gingerly. There were marks on the wax when he removed the key. With a small file, he filed where the marks showed on the wax.

A strong, unmistakable smell assailed his nostrils when the door opened. One glance at the bed, then Kirby slipped inside quickly and closed the door, his heart beating jerkily.

Face down on the bed lay the body of Anna Vandervort, clothed as he had last seen her. A bread knife was buried to the hilt in her back. She must have been struck from behind without warning. Stunned, he turned the body over on the bloody bedspread. No bruise on the face or hands. No; the girl had had no chance to fight for her life!

Another blank wall! And he'd been so certain the Dutch girl would give him information which would lead to Hancock. Yes; knowing too much of Hancock's game was why she'd died. Knowing too much himself was also the reason an attempt had been made to kill him in his apartment. . . . *But what of Karen Revell?*

"Face it, Kirby!" he told himself thickly. "Karen may be dead, too."

Fighting a chill torpor, Kirby tried to orient himself. Apparently he was in Peter Vandervort's bedroom. The adjacent bedroom must have been Anna's. To the right was a small kitchen. In a hasty search, Kirby found a small splinter of thick glass on the kitchen floor and a small, broken fir twig.

There were fir trees where the car had run over the embankment! After leaving the wreck, had Hancock and his confederate come here immediately to await the girl's return?

WORKING swiftly, Kirby found an envelope addressed in a faltering feminine hand and post-marked Vera Cruz, Mexico. A blunt, forceful hand had written Hancock's address on the back; the handwriting was similar to the writing on the slip found in Vandervort's coat hem. But there was no letter in the envelope, nor could Kirby find it in the apartment.

As he was finishing the search, he discovered a savings deposit book in Anna's dresser drawer. The deposits told a story of small wages and determined thrift. Eight to twelve dollars were deposited nearly every week for the first six months after the account was opened. After that, weekly deposits doubled. Peter Vandervort had apparently found manual work while his sister was learning the language. Then she'd found work, too. The savings had steadily risen; withdrawals were rarely

for more than five or six dollars until April 27, 1940.

Here an exciting note crept into the cold figures with the withdrawal of \$1,000. Kirby pondered the figure. Suddenly it read like history.

Holland was invaded in early May of 1940!

Had a \$1,000 draft been sent to The Netherlands?

There were two \$100 withdrawals in early 1941; and \$400 more on July 16. Less than \$200 was left in the account, and \$20 of that had been taken out the previous day—about enough to buy a second hand .32 pistol!

Kirby jotted down the significant figures, replaced the bank book, and slipped unseen from the apartment house.

He took a taxi directly to the Secoma Savings Bank. Because Mike Thrasher had saved the bank a whopping loss by uncovering an embezzling employee, Kirby had no difficulty learning what he wanted to know.

The bank's records showed what had become of the withdrawals from the Vandervort account. One thousand dollars had been cabled to Rotterdam. Two cashier's checks for \$100 each had been drawn to Mrs. Elsa Vandervort and cashed by a Mexican bank in Vera Cruz. Another cashier's check for \$400 had been drawn to M. S. Hancock, and endorsed by rubber stamp to make it payable to Hancock's account in the Secoma First National Bank.

Kirby also had his account there; he soon learned all that the First National knew about Hancock. Hancock had opened his account by mail. None of the tellers ever remembered him making any deposit except by mail. The account had been open less than a year; yet there had been many deposits, nearly all of which were drafts drawn on the branches of American banks in

various Central and South American countries, or by foreign banks in the two hemispheres.

But the last item of information Kirby uncovered gave him a queasy feeling. Hancock had withdrawn all of his account but \$100 that morning, sending a messenger with a check for \$27,876, payable to cash.

"Hancock always made withdrawals that way, but we hesitated about cashing so large a check," McKinstry, the cashier, explained. "We stalled the messenger and phoned Hancock's office. His stenographer said Hancock had called her, explaining that a big deal had come up for which he needed immediate cash. We had no legitimate reason for refusing payment; the signature was authentic."

KIRBY sat staring bleakly from his office window. The fiery sky darkened, lights twinkled on Puget Sound. He hated the forced inactivity; but he could not afford to miss a call from Tony Thrasher.

For his scatterbrained assistant now trailed the last link with the missing Hancock. All other trails were broken. The two Vandervorts were dead; Karen Revell, kidnapped. Pearl Loring alone remained.

At six o'clock, the phone rang. Kirby said hoarsely, "Yes? That you, Thrasher? Where's Loring?"

"The blonde menace is right here with the B. T. O.—the Big Time Operator, Tony Thrasher. This cookie is some rug-cutter, Cap'n! I'm at a juke joint out on Reynard Boulevard. Loring came here alone.

"I think someone phoned her to come here. I follow Luscious in a cab. She looks over this joint like it's strange. After a few minutes I breeze in. She's at a corner table, practically gnawing her finger-nails to the elbow. She looks

at me half-scared and half-expectant. So I figure she's waiting for someone she hasn't seen before."

"Brilliant," Kirby said dryly. "Go on."

"I go over to the juke box, and shove in a nickel on a Benny Goodman jumber. I take a good gander at Loring and see she's strictly adequate. I have this smooth number going, all right; her feet are tapping.

"So I go over and say, 'How about a little shincracking, witch?' So we dance, see? When I park myself, it's at the doll's table. We jig a couple more times, then stow some groceries. Everything would be up-beat if the dilly didn't look like she was waiting for an earthquake.

"She goes out to powder her nose and while she's out I'm blowing you to the latest news flash, Cap'n. Everything's under control!"

"See she doesn't slip her mooring while you're not watching."

"Let's not pursue it," said Thrasher placidly.

"I'll chow down, but I'll go on watch again in half an hour. Keep in touch with the ship. What's your number there?"

Tony Thrasher told him.

Rosetti, the plump proprietor of the restaurant across the street, stared at Kirby's headgear in alarm when the detective entered.

"Mist' Kirby, she's a no goot, da hat! She looks da ridic'!"

Kirby tossed his hat on the stand. "Never mind my hat," he growled. "Throw up a mess of worms and a cup of mud."

Rosetti stiffened. "Please Mist' Kirby! Spagett'! Coffee!"

He went away shaking his fuzzy head. The restaurant was crowded, noisier than usual, and the service slower.

KIRBY'S phone was ringing when he opened his office door. He jumped for the instrument, and yelled, "Hello?" but there was no answer. He dialed the number Tony Thrasher had given him, and got a busy signal. He kept dialing at half-minute intervals.

Presently the phone rang again, and Kirby pounced on it. "Hello?"

A low, musical voice spoke. "This is Karen, Skipper."

A shiver traveled down Kirby's back, his eyes stung, and for a moment he couldn't say anything. "Karen, where are you?"

"I don't know how long they'll allow me to talk to you." She spoke breathlessly. "I'm at an old two-story gray house on the bluff at Strickland Park. A place that's for rent. Skipper, listen carefully: *Don't come here—it's a trap!*"

Suddenly there was a piercing scream that froze Kirby's blood.

"Karen!" he shouted hoarsely. "Karen, do you hear me?"

No answer! He kept repeating her name, his blood like ice. The line seemed dead. Who was the wealthy lumberman who had lived in the large gray mansion until his death two months before? Ruthmore? No; *Rutherford!*

Swiftly Kirby looked up the number. He could raise no one. Finally he called Information. "Jacob Rutherford is dead. Has his service been discontinued?"

A pause; then: "No; service has not been discontinued."

Kirby reached for his hat. The phone rang again. He leapt for it.

"Karen?"

"No; this is Thrasher, Cap'n. I been trying to get you."

"Make it chop-chop—hurry!"

"I was clicking like a million with Potent Stuff when a call comes for her.

Loring is white as a ghost when she returns. Pretty soon she goes to powder her nose again. I watch the door, but she doesn't come out. So I send in a car-hop to look for her. She's skipped out on me!"

"Did she climb out a window?"

"Yeah. Another car-hop said Loring ran up to a car just driving in, shoved a bill at the driver, and asked him to take her somewhere."

Kirby sat motionless for a minute, thinking.

"The car drove north?"

"How'd you know?"

"Wait right there," Kirby said. "Ask that car-hop to point that driver out to you if he returns to eat. Find out where he took Pearl Loring."

Kirby deliberated a moment. Then he called the beer parlor where he had left Ole Ulvestad. Presently the fisherman was on the wire.

"By gosh, is that you, Captain Kirby?" asked a foggy voice. "I thought you was going to be gone only two-three hours. You know what my old woman do when she see Olie? She kill him almost, I bet!"

"Start the motor going, and keep her going, understand?"

"Sure! But you better hurry, by damn, or I go home!"

THE phone rang once more as Kirby started to leave his office.

"Thrasher again, Cap'n. The guy who took Loring away got back here. He left her half a block from Strickland Park. He thought there was something screwy, so he watched her. She cut down through the woods to the private road so that she wouldn't pass the gateman."

"What's Pearl Loring's address?"

"Cap'n, you know I don't mix business and pleasure!"

"Stop stalling! What's her address?"

"Uh—well, Smiley Bluffs. Seven-nine-two Soundview Avenue."

Kirby hurried down to the street to find a cab. The driver looked up above the level of Kirby's eyes as the latter gave his directions.

"Never mind my hat!" Kirby flared.

"If my old woman saw me coming home in a thing like that—"

"Skip it!" Kirby said between his teeth.

SMILEY BLUFFS was only a few blocks off the direct route to Salmon Bay. A taxi was just drawing up to the small house at 792 Soundview Avenue when Kirby reached it. He jumped out of his cab, and ran up to the girl who stepped out of the other taxi. He paid off her driver.

"I didn't think you went for me," Pearl Loring said. "But I liked you."

"Thought you didn't have a date tonight."

"I had dinner with a kinda half-baked fella, but I walked out on him." She regarded him half-apprehensively. "I came straight home, Gus."

"Come clean, Loring! You ate at a juke joint while you waited there for a call from Hancock. To ditch a certain Tony Thrasher, you climbed through the window of the women's room and paid a driver to take you to Strickland Park. Leaving the car half a block from the entrance, you cut through the woods, following the road to a large, gray house—"

Her eyes widened with terror. "It's not true," she whispered.

"You didn't want to go there, but you were afraid of losing your job. Two men met you. The tall, thin one had a black beard. The other man was heavily built, shorter, and stocky."

Her face was dead white. "No, no, no! It's not true!"

"You were called to that house to do

just one thing—to scream!"

She started whimpering; he gripped her arm as she turned to flee.

"Did you see the other girl in that house?"

She drew a sharp breath. "No! If I'd known she was there, I'd never have—" She raised swimming eyes. "I'm not a bad girl, Gus. Honest!"

"If you didn't see the other girl, where was she?"

"Upstairs, I guess. The tall man was standing beside me when they let the girl phone. The other man went outside. Hancock told me I had to scream when he told me to; he was listening at the downstairs phone. When the girl upstairs said something about it being a trap, Hancock put the phone in front of me and I screamed."

"What happened then?"

"The line kinda went dead as if the chunky fella outside had busted the wire. Hancock said, 'That will be all, Miss Loring. Leave Strickland Park the way you came and say nothing about this. If you breathe a word—' I knew he meant he'd bump me. My God, Gus, you mustn't tell!"

"Don't worry," he said.

"How did you know Hancock was trying to lead you into a trap? He thought you'd hurry immediately to Strickland Park. He'd have killed you!"

Kirby smiled bleakly. "He made one mistake. Karen rarely screams. Where were Hancock and this other man waiting to kill me?"

"I heard sounds in the shrubbery above the house when I went up the road."

"That's what I wanted to know."

SHE fumbled at her purse. "What you said today got me kinda worried. A big fat sheriff came later and asked a lotta questions. Then that call

came telling me to go to the juke joint. It added up pretty whacky, so I took something from the safe—"

Abruptly her arm encircled Kirby's neck. "Gus, I could go for you, even with that hat." He started to disengage her arm when he realized she was putting something in his pocket she did not wish the driver to see.

"And that part," she said, stepping back, "is straight." She regarded him soberly. "That girl at the house, Gus, she's pretty swell?"

"Yes," said Kirby.

She bit her lip; then turned abruptly and ran into the house.

Kirby slipped his hand into his pocket after the cab started on toward Salmon Bay. He felt a thick envelope. He restrained the impulse to open it. Instead, he removed his hat, studying it with vast distaste.

PLOUGHING northward, the Chinook heeled sharply under the impact of seas on her port quarter. Lights on the eastern cliffs appeared farther apart. Second-growth firs replaced houses, the cliffs grew steeper, and, except for a train shaking along below them, there was no sign of man.

Pearl Loring's letter had been burning Kirby's pocket, but he'd had no chance to read it in the cab, or after reaching the boat. Glancing at it now, he saw that it was addressed to M. S. Hancock. Kirby was beyond respect for that man's legal rights. He tore open the envelope. Out fell a letter wrapped around a sheaf of Mexican currency. Counting the bills, he judged it amounted to approximately four hundred dollars.

His rugged face went grim as he read the letter. He was scarcely aware of bracing the wheel against the quartering seas. Reviewing the events of the day and the night before, he wondered

how he'd ever failed to mesh the pieces of the puzzle before. . . .

Twinkling lights on the cliff ahead showed him that he was approaching Strickland Park. Kirby lashed his wheel, stepping outside to extinguish port and starboard riding lights. Phosphorescent spray broke in a curling silver line over the top of the breakwater.

The small power boat bounced like a cork in swirling cross-currents as Kirby steered through the opening. But the water was lake-smooth in the lee of the stone barrier. Throttling his motor, he glided up to a small float where several yachts were moored and secured his boat.

A winding road led up through the woods to Strickland Park, but that might lead him into Hancock's ambush. To avoid that trap, he'd come by water. The Rutherford mansion stood at the top of a bluff overlooking the yacht basin, and now Kirby started to work his way quietly and carefully up a gully eroded in the cliff.

After a fifteen-minute climb, he found himself at last at the bottom of a spacious garden which showed recent neglect. Grass had grown long, and the pools he passed as he walked toward the house were overflowing. The large gray house he approached was silent as death; not a flicker of light came from any window.

WITH a skeleton key, Kirby opened French doors facing a terrace. Slipping inside, he found himself in an immense living room. Moonlight threw Hepplewhite and Chippendale furniture into ghostly relief.

He felt a weight on his chest as he whispered from one downstairs room to another without finding anyone. A stairs mounted from the hall, and Kirby climbed stealthily. Turning left at the

top, he opened a door. Shades were drawn. He groped along to a window. Holding back a shade, the silver gleam of moonlight revealed that the room was unoccupied. He tried one bedroom after another, then turned right toward the south wing. At the end of a corridor, he sensed that there must be a master's bedroom. Opening the door, he found he was right.

When he pulled back the shade, a shaft of moonlight fell across the head of a four-poster bed and a very white face. Large gray eyes stared at Kirby. A girl was spread-eagled to the bed by ropes.

Kirby's heart twisted sharply. "Karen!" he whispered thickly.

Even with the gag, the girl choked out, "*Skipper!*"

He sprang to untie the ropes. He rubbed her numb wrists.

"Skipper, I was afraid that scream would bring you into their trap!"

"It was the tip-off that you were all right. You don't scream."

"I don't, do I?" she said slowly. "No; when my father took me on his ships as a child, he wouldn't speak to me for days if I screamed."

"Where are they?" he asked tersely.

"Waiting at the drive entrance, I believe. Skipper, do you know who they are? That's what caught me off-guard."

"Yes, I know," he said grimly. "Never mind that now. I want to get you safely down to the boat. Then I'll come back here and find them."

"Skipper," she said anxiously, "couldn't you let the sheriff—"

"I can't risk men like that slipping their moorings and escaping!"

Helping her to her feet, he led the way downstairs, out through the French doors and across the terrace. They worked down the miniature canyon in the cliff face as quietly as possible.

Silently crossing the tracks, they hurried along the float.

Karen's lovely face lighted as she saw the boat. "Ours, Skipper?"

Before he could answer, there was a sound in the wheelhouse. His hand darted toward his shoulder holster. Before he could reach his gun, a black-bearded face appeared from the wheelhouse and a .45 covered Kirby's waistline.

"Hands up, please!" said a voice as cold as ice.

"Hancock!" Kirby said in a brittle voice. "Or should I say *Harlington?*"

THE MAN with the gun removed the black beard and mustache, revealing the trim silver mustache and the gaunt face of Lewis Harlington.

"It makes no difference what you call me now, Captain Kirby. It's fortunate I heard your boat and got down here in time. You might have escaped."

A heavy-set man stepped out of the other wheelhouse door. He still wore a cap with ear-flaps, and his coat collar was turned up. But in the white moonlight, Kirby saw that his surmise was correct. It was Ross Massee—Harlington's partner, and one of Karen's two employers.

Massee indicated the wheelhouse with his gun. "Get in there!"

Kirby's eyes twitched with anger. "You're going to kill a girl who has been a faithful employee?"

Harlington said, "We have no choice."

Massee raised his gun. "Lew, since we have to do it anyway—"

Realizing his intention, Kirby hurried Karen into the wheelhouse. While Harlington covered the detective, Massee reached around from behind to remove the gun and all his papers. When he found the envelope, Kirby knew it might cost Pearl Loring her life. He

snatched it, trying to throw it into the water beyond Harlington. The tall man knocked it down with his gun and picked it up. A wintery smile quirked his lips.

"So you know everything?"

Kirby did not reply.

"Start the motor," Massee ordered.

Kirby saw no advantage in refusal. While there was life, there was always the possibility of escape. He started the engines, steering through the break-water opening. Massee pushed him away from the wheel.

"Since we're coming back here alone, I might as well learn to steer."

Clouds had drifted over the moon, and now it was smoky black. Harlington kept his gun pointed at Kirby, never shifting his gaze. Kirby looked at Karen. Her lovely face was pale, but she smiled encouragement.

"How did you know I was Hancock?" Harlington asked.

"I knew there was something wrong this morning," Kirby muttered. "You claimed business was dull but you'd offered Karen a raise. That meant you were getting money from some other source. Then you wore gloves merely to go downstairs for a shave. Moreover, you winced when I shook hands with you. Afterwards I realized why. Your hands had been cut by flying glass when I forced Massee to drive off the road last night. The gloves concealed cuts. I thought it was Loring who had informed Massee to follow me after I left the Bancroft Building. Instead, you had come down with me so that you could tip off Massee to shadow me."

THERE were many lights, but no boats were close. Harlington was watching, apparently waiting until the nearer boats were farther away so that there would be no witnesses to testify

to seeing the flashes of an automatic.

Playing desperately against the ebbing tide, Kirby went on:

"Yes, Harlington, you and Massee were honest importers and exporters until a shortage of bottoms and the blockade dried up your business. You didn't hear from some of your European exporters until they escaped to Central or South America. Maybe they begged for help for old time's sake.

"You couldn't help them, but it gave you an idea. They could, for a split, contact refugees in the Latin-American countries, and whisper the information that a man in Secoma could get them a forged passport so they wouldn't have to wait for their quota to enter the United States legally. To cover your tracks, you set up a dummy office and hired a steno by mail. You thought no one would ever learn that you were Hancock.

"The poor devils had been kicked around until they would have given anything to get into this country. Probably many refugees gave their last cent to buy a forged passport from M. S. Hancock. But you weren't risking government heat by actually issuing any such passports. You fleeced the refugees, and forgot them. Refugees couldn't squawk because what they were attempting was illegal. Illegal, maybe, but they'd been through hell!"

"Massee and I'd been through hell, too," Harlington said hoarsely. "Our business dwindling away month after month—"

Kirby snorted in disgust.

"Your contemptible racket worked smoothly until you accepted \$400 from a Dutchman named Peter Vandervort to get his mother into this country. I believe she wrote him about you from Mexico. Anyway, you got the money. When Vandervort couldn't find you at

the dummy office, he suspected that you went there only at nights to get your mail.

"He waited for you one night. You'd have been all right if you could have bought him off, but he was stubborn and plenty mad. You were afraid he'd talk. For you and Massee, that would have meant a federal penitentiary. You'd used the mails to defraud. So you killed Vandervort, dumping his body into the bay.

"I found the corpse the same night that Anna Vandervort screwed up the courage to face you. Your attempt to kill us failed and you knew you weren't safe while we were shipshape. Events were closing in!"

Harlington said raggedly, "I didn't mean to kill Vandervort. I meant only to threaten him. But he kept coming. I had to shoot."

"You had Anna Vandervort's address, and you knew where to find me. You decided to give us both a broadside last night. Finding Karen in my room changed your plans."

"The beard didn't fool me," Karen shuddered.

"You overpowered Karen. Probably knocked her unconscious. And then took her to Rutherford's home until you could make up your mind what to do with her. You know you could get by the old gateman there by mentioning the name of any resident."

MASSEE spun the wheel desperately as a ship bore down upon them. The power boat had no lights. They narrowly missed a collision, the captain of the ship apparently never seeing them.

"You decided to use Karen as bait for a trap," Kirby went on. "Then you could kill us both. But what would prevent her from telling me it was a trap? Then one of you had a

bright idea. You'd have Pearl Loring scream into a connecting phone and then break the line. My concern over Karen would make me blow my boilers trying to get here even if I suspected a trap. That was your mistake. Karen never screams!"

Harlington's jaw sagged. "I wondered why she didn't scream last night—"

"I think that's the story," Kirby said bleakly.

"It's close enough," said Harlington wryly.

"Too close!" Massee snarled. Anxiously he watched an approaching boat. Kirby knew that Massee was anxious to kill them without delay. He still hoped to play for time.

He said, "You fellows certainly know nothing of navigation laws."

"We have other troubles," snapped Massee.

"You'll have plenty if a ship reports you."

Massee turned, his lids drooping. "What do you mean?"

"Traveling without lights or a flag. Any master might report you."

"Harlington, see that he attends to that. I'll watch the girl."

"I'll be hanged if I'll—" He looked at the gun in Harlington's taut hand, and appeared to wilt. "You hold the whip hand!" he snapped.

He found a flag in a locker, but Harlington had a gun at his back as he strode aft and raised the flag on the stern flagpole. The wind whipped out his matches when he tried to light the oil riding lamps.

"Have to light these in the wheelhouse," he grunted.

He got the lights burning. Then he put the red light in the starboard socket, and the green light in the port socket.

"Now get back to the wheelhouse!" Harlington snapped. "No tricks!"

CHILLS coursed down Kirby's back as the small boat reached mid-channel. They were now far enough from land so that no shot would be heard. Nor was it likely that the flash of the automatic would be noticed on shore.

Just then a Victoria ferry loomed up ahead. Massee looked at it; then he glanced at Harlington, and shook his head. Kirby went limp.

For the next half hour, one boat after another postponed their execution, just when it seemed certain to Kirby that everything was lost.

Several ships came so close that waves washed aboard the *Chinook*. Neither Harlington nor Massee were willing to risk the electric chair with witnesses so close at hand. Massee, besides, had his hands full trying to avoid collisions.

"What are they trying to do," he ranted, "—run me down?"

Suddenly swiftly-moving lights cut the darkness and a long, lean gray vessel with a sharp prow appeared. A searchlight's powerful beam found the *Chinook*, sweeping her fore and aft.

Panic entered Massee's eyes; he whispered hoarsely: "Put that gun down, Lew! Do you want to be seen?"

Harlington said tersely, "It's a Coast Guard cutter and they're going to crash us! Looks as if she might have been searching for us. What have we done to attract attention?"

Kirby grinned tightly. "Probably at least three captains have reported us by wireless for passing on the wrong side."

Massee cursed, his eyes murderous. "Kirby, it will be a pleasure—"

"Wait until we shake this cutter," Harlington said uneasily.

The cutter was turning. Cutting speed, she drew alongside. A voice called, "What's wrong, *Chinook*?"

Harlington's automatic was at his side, below the woodwork of the closed door. The bore was turned upward so that it covered Kirby's chest. Harlington's eyes were desperate, but he kept his voice casual:

"Nothing, sir."

There was a momentary silence aboard the cutter. Then an authoritative voice called down, "Stand by, *Chinook*. We're coming aboard."

Hatred brimmed in Massee's eyes as he glanced at Kirby. He whirled the wheel, and the power boat swung sharply.

"Stand by!" barked the voice above. "Stand by—or we'll fire!"

Massee continued turning the wheel. The voice above wasn't fooling:

"Read-dy . . . Aim! . . . Fire!"

THERE was a deafening boom. The warning shot, deliberately high, whined over their bow, and *punged* into the water with a splash.

"They've got us," Harlington said thickly. "Cut your speed, Massee. They'll blow us out of the water!"

"Is that any worse than frying in an electric chair?" Massee raged.

Kirby saw the pattern events were taking. Several more warning shots might be fired before a shell sank their boat. His enemies were on the spot . . . but so were Karen and himself. Beside himself with fury, Massee was unwilling to admit there was no escape.

Massee glared upward as the cutter swung in on them, preparatory to firing another shot. Harlington followed the direction of his confederate's glance, his gaunt face pale and strained.

Kirby saw his chance in that momentary lapse of vigilance.

He sprang toward Massee. With Massee's gun, he'd have both men at his mercy! Harlington's eyes caught the movement. "Watch out, Massee!"

Kirby got a grip on the gun just as Massee's hand tightened on it. As the stocky man turned, Kirby swung for the heavy jaw with his left. Massee grunted as his heavy body struck the spokes of the wheel.

Kirby tried to wrench the gun away, but Massee still clung to it.

"Knife him, Lew!" he gasped. "*Quick!*"

Kirby saw that Harlington had a knife too. He saw it flicker through the air, expertly thrown. It narrowly missed Karen! It flicked straight at him. . . .

Kirby's hat fell off his head. He felt there ought to be pain, but there wasn't. He heaved the automatic with all his strength, twisting at the same time. It brought Massee half around in front of him before pain finally forced him to release the gun.

Harlington's automatic cracked now.

Massee screamed and his hands dropped limply. He stood swaying for a moment; then a slight roll of the boat sent him pitching forward.

ONCE more the other automatic cracked. Kirby heard the crunch of lead overhead. He had a hasty glance of Karen struggling with Harlington. He knew she had spoiled the importer's second shot by knocking up his gun.

Sweat beaded Kirby's bronzed face. His finger tightened on the trigger and then relaxed. He couldn't risk striking Karen!

Harlington pushed her roughly against the wheelhouse bench.

As his gun swung around, the automatic in Kirby's hand kicked twice. Harlington's eyes closed; his face twisted with pain. The gun dropped from his limp hand to the decking. He

fell on top of it.

Feet thudded the deck outside. Glancing up, Kirby saw that the cutter now brushed the side of the *Chinook*. A Jacob's-ladder hung down the side of the gray vessel. Seamen with rifles were climbing down that ladder; other seamen ran across the deck toward the wheelhouse door.

A bo'sun flung open the door. "What's going on here?" He looked down at the two motionless figures, and then up at Karen Revell and Kirby. His grim expression suddenly vanished.

"What's going on here, Captain Kirby?"

Kirby smiled faintly. "Miss Revell and I were being taken on a one-way cruise, McVay. I thought you'd never get here."

Karen's lovely eyes widened. "*Get here? Did you signal, Skipper?*"

"Sure he signalled," Bo'sun McVay grinned. "Three different ships reported a power boat flying a flag upside down to indicate distress. And your green and red lights were placed on the wrong sides as an additional distress signal. But it took us time to find you."

Karen smiled. "It was lucky Mr. Harlington was a landlubber."

McVay said soberly, "Afraid I'll have to detail a crew for your boat, and take you into technical custody, Captain Kirby. But if I know you, you can prove your innocence."

Karen studied him with an odd glance. Kirby sighed, removed his punctured hat, and sent it sailing through the open wheelhouse door.

Karen nodded. "That's better. They say you can tell a man by the hat—"

"Karen, if you don't mind," Kirby sighed, "let's not discuss *hats!*"

AND ON THE OTHER HAND— MURDER!

By Betty Pierce

How good are you at solving mysteries? Here's a little mystery story in which all the clues are presented. Check your solution on page 305.

THE man half sat, half lay in a big chair in his bedroom. In his right temple was a black hole, and blood had run from it down his face, soaking the collar and shoulder of his dressing gown, and dripping on the floor. Beneath his limp right hand which hung over the arm of the chair lay the gun.

Inspector Carr glanced about the room. Everything seemed in perfect order. Bed neatly turned down; pens, ink, blotters and an ash tray on the desk; lamp, ash tray and cigaret box on the night stand, and the usual brushes, scissors, shoe horn, magnifying mirror and the framed picture of a woman on the dresser.

Carr, without touching the body, peered at the wound.

"Powder burns," he observed aloud.

The uniformed officer at the door spoke.

"Suicide, Inspector?"

"Looks like it. Yep, sure looks like it," he answered. He dropped to his hands and knees, the better to observe the lax right hand. It was large and brown, and the nails on the first two fingers were clipped very short. Carr glanced at the other hand. All five nails extended a fraction of an inch beyond the tips of the fingers.

He got to his feet and glanced about the room again. Only one light was burning, a floor lamp to the left of the dead man; all the shades were drawn, and both bedroom doors were open.

"Hansen," Carr said, "send the woman in here."

She came, trembling, and twisting a handkerchief in her hands.

"Mrs. Jackson, was there anyone in the house at the time of the—uh—shooting, except Mr. Jackson and yourself?"

She shook her head.

"And has anything been moved since then?"

"No," she replied. "I was careful of that. I'd read somewhere—" her voice choked off in a sob.

"Ah! I see . . . Mrs. Jackson, did your husband play a guitar or any other musical instrument?"

"A guitar?" she echoed, puzzled. "Why, no."

"Do you know any reason why your husband would kill himself?"

She hesitated a moment, then said slowly:

"Yes, he threatened to, last night and again tonight because — but I thought he was only joking."

"Because?" Carr prompted.

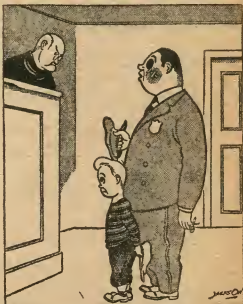
"He'd found out that I was no longer in love with him—there was someone else. I was in the bathroom." She nodded toward the door to the right of the dead man. "I heard the shot and came out and saw him—I put on my robe and ran . . ."

"She came running out on the street" Hanson said "and grabbed me."

"I'm booking you on suspicion of murder, Mrs. Jackson. I asked you four questions and you lied twice, a pretty bad average."

How did Inspector Carr know that Mrs. Jackson had killed her husband?

(Solution on page 305)



"Resisting an officer, your honor!"

THE MENTAL BLOODHOUND

By HELMAR LEWIS

"GOOD morning, Professor Wright."

Nurse Grace Chesley adjusted the venetian blind so that the morning sun sifted through the shafts and streaked the room with golden sunbeams. Then she looked over to the immaculate white bed in which lay the figure of a man just awakening.

From the outlines suggested by the coverlet, it was obvious that his slender body had wasted away almost to skeletal proportions. A thin arm rested above the cover; the fingers were like whitened bones. It could easily have

ring liquid in a glass.

"There's time for medicine later," he said, "turn on the radio. Something must have happened by now."

"Sorry, medicine first."

"Did you bring the morning paper?"

Grace took the glass to his bedside and slipped one arm professionally under his head to lift it.

"Now drink this."

He gulped it quickly and then asked again, "Did you bring the morning paper?"

"Yes, but—nothing's happened yet."

"Impossible! I don't believe you.

Everything we do is governed to a certain degree by our glands. Professor Wright knew glands, so he solved crimes from his bed

been the body of a dead man for not a muscle moved to reveal life. But when his eyes opened the man seemed vitally alive. Like a sponge they seemed to soak in the beneficent warmth of the sun and revel in its pervasive goodness.

"Morning, nurse." He strained his eyes to one side to see her, but she stood just beyond his range of vision. He heard the tinkle of a spoon stir-

Two weeks without one crime being committed. Are we suddenly living in a paradise? There'd better be a crime soon, nurse, or I'll die of sheer boredom. Got the paper?"

"Yes." She held it slantwise so that he could read the items. He glanced quickly over the first page.

"It doesn't seem possible that the underworld has been serene and innocent for two solid weeks," he said.



"There is your killer!" said Wright. "Get him, before he kills himself!"

"I guess the only way to keep you happy is for me to go out and rob a bank."

"You're not the type at all. You'd murder but you wouldn't steal." Professor Wright's eyes brightened. "Here's something interesting. There was a convention last night of the American Association of Criminologists."

"What did you mean when you said I'd murder?" Grace asked.

"Wonder if Hennessey was there."

"Why did you say I'd murder, Professor Wright?"

"Your eye-brows are too thick for stealing. You're the Borgia type."

"My eye-brows are not thick!"

"You pluck 'em, that's why."

THE DOOR opened and Mrs. Gummins, the housekeeper peered in. She was scowling and her upper lip was hidden by the protruding pout of her lower one.

"Morning, Mrs. Gummins," Professor Wright said. Then he looked up at the nurse. "Mrs. Gummins has a good share of postpituitary, only she's obviously subthyroid."

Mrs. Gummins dropped her jaw slightly. "Is 'e out uv 'is 'ead?" she asked.

"No, Mrs. Gummins, I'm quite sane. Just bored, that's all. No crimes. No criminals to catch. Nothing to do. So you may as well bring my breakfast up."

"That there feller's 'ere. That American bobby wi' the red 'air and the green suit."

"Hennessey! Thank God! Tell him to come right up. Never mind the breakfast. Hurry, Mrs. Gummins."

"Shouldn't 'e ought to 'ave 'is breakfast, nurse?"

"I guess he can wait a little while."

The woman turned to go. She left the door open and they could hear her mumbling in her Cockney whine as she went to get the visitor, "I can't for the life o' me see why that there 'Ennessey don't stop botherin' a poor invalid what's paralyzed from the neck down. Why can't 'e do 'is own detective work, the big lummo."

When Hennessey walked in, happiness welled over the wasted hollows of Professor Wright's face so that he actually beamed.

"Sit down, Hennessey. Is it murder or just a report on the Convention last night?" the invalid asked eagerly.

"Well, Professor, it's a little bit of both." He lifted a chair by the side of the door and carried it to the bedside. As he passed the nurse, he grinned, "'Morning, Miss Chesley."

"Forget the formalities. The devil with the morning," the professor snapped peevishly. "Sit down and tell me what's happened."

Hennessey pulled a crumpled pack of cigarettes from his pocket.

"I don't know if I shoulda bothered you with this one. It's kinda tough, even for you."

"Hennessey, give me the details," the sick man pleaded. "I've been lying here in this damned bed for almost two weeks waiting for you to come with another case. What's happened to the damned criminals. Have you tracked them all down to their lairs?"

"I oughta pretty soon with your help. I don't know what I'd a done without it the past three years. The truth. Why, they'd think I was off my chump if I said that I hadn't solved the murders—that it was a guy what hadn't been outa bed for three years—that it was Professor Ogden Wright who used to be professor of Endocrin. . . ."

"Hennessey, if I weren't paralyzed

I'd take you . . . "

"O. K. IT'S like this. There was a convention last night at the Palmer House. The American Association of . . . "

"Criminologists," Wright interrupted. "Yes, I know that. Lester Gould was the main speaker. Very smart man, Gould. You could learn a few things from him. One of the sharpest brains in the country. Well, go on. I want to hear about the murder."

"It happened at the convention."

"Good Lord! What a magnificent place for a crime."

"That's right." Hennessey squashed his cigarette butt in an ash tray.

"Who was the victim?"

"Lester Gould."

Wright looked shocked.

"I'm sorry to hear that. How did it happen? Who did it?"

"Wait a minute, I'm the guy what tells you what happened, but you're the guy what tells me who done it. Remember?" Hennessey replied.

"All right, go on."

"I wasn't at the banquet myself," Hennessey explained, "but it seems they were just finished eating—the usual lousy creamed chicken, I suppose—and the men were sitting around smoking cigars and talking shop, like 'you remember how I nabbed "Killer" Cade' and that stuff and . . . "

"What happened?" the invalid growled.

"Well, Lester Gould was scheduled to give the main talk of the evening. And you know how he can turn on the fancy gab. Well, this time, it seems he'd arranged to have a lot of slide-pictures shown and he was going to give a spiel about them. So, when the lights were turned out . . . "

"Struck in the dark," the professor whispered.

"Yah, that's right," Hennessey continued after the interruption. "He starts in to give this spiel when the pictures were being shown. He talked through a hand microphone and he'd told the engineer to bring some records of horns and guns and stuff like that to make the pictures seem more real. So, when there was a picture of a guy pulling a trigger, why, the engineer puts on a record of a gun shooting off. It gave the whole thing a lot of tone, see?"

"Gould wasn't shot though, was he." The professor said this as a statement and not as a question.

"No, you're right. He wasn't shot. And that would have been the simplest way to kill him with all those records of shooting going off."

"Go on."

"WELL, the talk and the pictures went on for about a half-hour. And it was pretty good from what the fellas said. He did forget his speech once but he picked right up again. Then when the lights go back on, what do you think they find?"

"Tell me!" the invalid snapped, "without asking riddles."

"You'll never guess," Hennessey said, "so I'll tell you. Slumped on the floor, they found Lester Gould stone-dead. Now figure that one out, Professor! And when they examined him they found his wrist-watch was smashed and had stopped fifteen minutes before the lecture was over and the lights went on. How do you like that one?"

"I do like it," the professor murmured. "Obviously the murderer was cunning and he had made elaborate plans of what he would do and when. Obviously, also, there was a childish boastfulness in his attitude. He probably thought he could commit the per-

fect crime."

"Then you don't think this thing is foolproof?" Hennessey asked. "You got some ideas already?"

"A few."

"That's swell. Because I sure thought you'd never . . ."

"Had Gould received any warning letters?"

"Well, now I don't know about that, except maybe the telegram," Hennessey replied.

"What telegram?"

"At the beginning of the banquet, Gould read off some telegrams. Some were congratulations and good luck and that sort of thing and some were from fellas who couldn't come. Then, when he starts to read one of them, he stops and then he laughs."

"What was in the telegram?"

"I brought it along. I don't think it's anything more than a gag, but I got a hunch to bring it along," Hennessey said. He shifted his huge bulk and dug into his back pocket. He pulled out the telegram, unfolded it and read, haltingly, "PREPARE FOR DEATH, LESTER GOULD. YOU WILL DIE TONIGHT. THE PERFECT CRIME WILL BE COMMITTED AND YOU WILL BE THE VICTIM."

The invalid's eyes brightened. He mumbled aloud, as though to himself,

"Obviously thymocentric with the possibility of a subparathyroid disorder. The telegram, the desire for the perfect crime, killing him in the dark—they all add up to thymocentric-subparathyroid."

A MUTED telephone bell interrupted them. The nurse started to answer it, but Hennessey stopped her.

"That must be from the coroner. I told him to call me here when he got and started for the door.

done with his autopsy."

"It was poison," Wright said. "The coroner will tell you it was death by poison."

Hennessey lifted the receiver. After a short conversation he hung up. He stood looking at the invalid for a few seconds, shaking his head.

"The coroner said it was death by poison. How do you hit it, Professor? Every time, you hit the answer right on the button." He lumbered back to his chair and sat down. "Doc Anders said he found sure signs of poison in Gould's insides. And he also found where it had been given—through a small puncture in the palm of the right hand."

"More ingenious cunning," the professor murmured, "and more signs of the thymocentric. What else is there, Hennessey?" he asked.

"That's all I know. I still think this is going to be a tough case," the detective said. "How are you going to figure this one out according to your glands and what-nots, Professor Wright?"

The professor didn't answer. He lay quietly with a slight frown on his forehead. Finally, he said:

"I can give you a description of the murderer now, but if you had a picture of the guests at the banquet I could pick him out and save you that much time."

Hennessey shot a startled glance at the nurse. She smiled sympathetically.

"I think Mr. Hennessey has tired you, Professor Wright," she said quietly. "Perhaps if he left now and came back later . . ."

"I'm not at all tired. As a matter of fact I feel exhilarated," the invalid protested.

"Yah, maybe I better come back later," Hennessey agreed. He got up

"Hennessey!" the professor shouted. "Come back here and sit down. You want to get the murderer, don't you?"

"Sure, but . . ."

"The papers all over the country will laugh their editorial heads off if this murder isn't solved immediately."

"I know, but . . ."

"Here is a banquet hall full of criminologists and detectives and a murder is committed and nobody knows who did it. You're going to look like a bunch of fools."

"That's right," Hennessey looked at the sick man for a moment and then he said, "but I'll look like the prize fool if you pick out a guy from his picture and say he done the murder. And suppose he hasn't done it."

"I haven't been wrong yet, have I?" Professor Wright queried.

"No."

"Well, then stop acting as though I had lost my mind. Sit down here and listen to me."

"O. K." Hennessey went back to his chair and sat down gingerly. "I can get you a picture of the fellas at the banquet. The papers sent a couple of men down to take photographs . . ."

"Get me a picture and I'll give you the murderer," the invalid promised.

"But how do you know the murderer'll be on the picture?"

"I've told you already. Because he's a thymocentric," Wright explained. Hennessey didn't reply and the professor continued, "get me a picture and have it blown up considerably. Do you understand?"

"O. K." the detective replied. "When do you want it?"

"As soon as possible if you want to catch your man alive. He's the type that's given to suicide. By the way," Wright asked, "you're holding all these men, aren't you?"

"Of course," Hennessey replied.

"We've got everyone who was at the banquet locked up in a bunch of hotel rooms with some of my best men standing guard."

"Fine."

"Well, I'll get going then," Hennessey said. He got up. "Do you think maybe we can get the murderer by the afternoon edition?"

"That depends on when you get the picture to me," the invalid replied.

"O.K. I'm leaving right now." Hennessey lumbered to the door, turned back once to say good-bye to nurse Chesley and left.

THE nurse put her thumb on the professor's wrist pulse.

"Would you like your breakfast, now?" she asked.

"No. Couldn't eat a thing."

"But you should. How about a glass of milk?"

"No. I'm too excited."

"You feel all right?"

"Fine! That's an interesting case, isn't it? Too bad it had to be Gould, though. He was a brilliant criminologist."

"How do you do it, Professor Wright?"

"Do what?"

"Solve all these cases? You've been bed-ridden for three years. You're never at the scene of the crime. You never see the victim or the suspects and yet, you always can figure out who did it. And you told Mr. Hennessey that you could give him a description of the murderer."

"I can," Wright replied. "Now let's review the important facts. First, the murder was committed in the dark. Second, it was not an obvious murder. By that I mean neither a gun nor a knife was used. Instead, the murder was done by poisoning."

"But," the nurse interrupted, "the coroner said the poison was administered by a pin prick in the palm of Gould's right hand. Wouldn't it have been possible for the murderer to have wounded Gould's hand before and not during the banquet?"

"Yes, it would have been possible, but not at all probable. You see, the thymocentric-subparathyroid criminal type prefers to be on the spot when the deed is done. He likes the murder to be sensational. And if Gould's hand had been pricked with poison before the banquet he would have died with the lights on. And this type of murderer usually strikes in the dark. As a matter of fact, the poison needle was probably in the handle of the microphone."

"But, Professor Wright," nurse Chesley said, "how could Mr. Gould have died before he finished his speech when everyone heard him talking? Mr. Hennessey said that his watch was smashed when they found him and it had stopped fifteen minutes before he actually finished his lecture."

"That's right," the invalid agreed. He closed his eyes wearily. The effort of talking at length had obviously sapped his nurtured strength.

AFTER a few moment's rest he continued:

"Do you remember that Hennessey said Gould had forgotten his speech at one point and then remembered and went on?"

"Yes."

"Gould had remarkable memory, so it's unlikely he would have forgotten his lecture. No," Wright explained, "it was at that moment that he was killed."

"But the rest of the speech?"

"As I mentioned before, nurse, the thymocentric-subparathyroid is cunning. He is a man who would have studied his victim. He would very

probably be able to imitate his voice and speech habits. And since a microphone often distorts a voice, there is no reason why anyone would suspect. But, to get back to the description."

"Would you rather rest a while?"

"No, I like to formulate my ideas."

"Then let me freshen your pillow."

Nurse Chesley raised the invalid's head gently and slid the pillow from under it. She shook it down and then replaced it.

"The man who murdered Lester Gould," Wright said quietly, "is of medium build. He is slightly bald and may be wearing a toupee. But his own hair is very fine. Possibly blonde."

"Wouldn't that description fit a number of people?" Nurse Chesley asked.

The professor continued, ignoring the interruption.

"Most positively, he will have a receding chin. His face will not be uniformly featured. That is, one side will be slightly larger than the other and his nose will be turned either to the right or to the left." He paused to gather strength to continue. Nurse Chesley waited eagerly for him to resume the description of the criminal.

"Particularly," the invalid went on, "the man will have very bad teeth. Many of them will be decayed and the upper front teeth, especially, will be misshapen and should have wide spaces between them. And this is most important: The man will have a small rat-like mouth and the expression on his face will be one of constant fear."

The professor closed his eyes and fell asleep from the emotional strain and excitement. Nurse Chesley sat for a few moments by his bed-side and then went to the window. She stood there waiting for Hennessey and the picture of the guests at the banquet. In a short while she saw him waddling quickly toward the house with a long cylindrical

package under his arm. She looked back at the sick man who was still asleep.

THE door-bell rang sharply. After a few moments it rang again, long and loud. The invalid's eyelids fluttered but did not open. Then Nurse Chesley heard Mrs. Gummins shuffling to the door. Hennessey came puffing into the room.

"Here it is. Got it right here." When he saw the professor lying quietly in bed he stopped.

"He ain't dead, is he?" Hennessey asked.

"No. He's only sleeping," the nurse replied. "All this excitement over-tired him."

"This is one helluva time to go to sleep," Hennessey said bitterly. "Here I break my neck getting this blown-up picture so's he can identify the criminal and he goes to sleep. Wake him up."

"Sssshh!" the nurse admonished. "Not so loud."

"Sssshhh!" came from the sick-bed. "Who's making such a racket?"

"It's me, Professor. It's Hennessey! I got the picture." Hennessey hurried to the invalid's side and began tearing the wrapping off the package. Professor Wright opened his eyes and smiled.

"Don't be nervous, Hennessey."

"I can't help it."

"I'll pick your man for you."

"O.K. Here's the picture." Hennessey held it up for the professor's scrutiny.

Wright examined each face in the photograph silently. Because of the number of people present and because of his thoroughness more than half an hour elapsed. Then, when the detective began to lose all hope of finding the murderer's picture in the group, he saw the professor's eyes light up.

"Got him?" he demanded excitedly.

"Yes," Professor Wright replied.

"Which one? Show me?"

"At the lower right hand corner of the photograph," the professor said, "immediately in front of the entire group but over to the extreme right."

THE detective indicated what he thought to be the suspect with his index finger.

"That one?"

"No! no! three faces to the right!"

The detective shifted his fat finger.

"This one here?"

"Yes," the professor said. "That one there."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

"He's the type you were talking about, huh?"

"The thymocentric-subparathyroid. Exactly. Notice the receding chin. Notice also the toupee, which indicates that he is bald, or partially bald," the invalid explained. "Observe in the small, open mouth that the man's teeth are set wide apart. Who is he? Why is he standing near the electrical equipment? Is he the electrician, the man in charge of the loudspeaker equipment?"

The detective, imbued with the invalid's enthusiasm, bent eagerly over the photograph. His forehead wrinkled in puzzlement for a moment. Then a gleam of knowledge ironed out the wrinkles.

"Yah, I remember him now," he boomed out. "He's the guy in charge of the electrical stuff. Name's Joe Foley, I think. Runs a recording studio or something."

"Fine! That fits in perfectly," the professor exclaimed. "You still have him detained?"

"Sure."

"Then you'd better arrest him in a hurry before he kills himself."

"O. K. I'll go right down." Hennes-

sey grabbed the picture and started for the door. Then he stopped quickly and turned back. "Hey, wait a minute. I can't just walk in there and say, 'You killed Lester Gould.' I gotta have proof. I gotta be able to say, 'You killed Lester Gould because of this and this and this.' See?"

"But it will be wasting time. Foley might be committing suicide this very minute."

"Wait a minute, Professor," Hennessey said. "I'll call one of my boys and tell him to keep a good watch on Foley. How's that? Then I'll stay here while you give me the dope. O. K.?"

"Excellent."

HENNESSEY called the hotel and left his orders. He had to argue a while because the police lieutenant at the other end couldn't see any reason for detaining Foley, of all people. But, Hennessey finally got him to agree. When he had hung up, he sat by the invalid's bed and said, impatiently:

"All right, what's the evidence?"

"I'm fairly sure," the professor began, "that careful examination of the hand microphone will show a small hole. This hole will only be large enough for a small needle—the poison needle."

"O. K." Hennessey said, "but what about Gould's dying before he finished talking? A guy can't lecture when he's dead, can he?"

"I had thought that the murderer imitated Gould's voice. The microphone would have helped the deceit because it often distorts a voice."

"Yah, that's right," Hennessey agreed.

"But, you tell me that Foley is in the recording business. Well, then, obviously, he had Gould make a record of his speech so that Gould could hear how it would sound on the pretense of adjusting the volume. Then Foley

kept the record and when Gould dropped dead, Foley simply put the record on his machine and no one was wiser."

"That must have been when everyone thought he had forgotten his speech."

"You see, Hennessey, the thymus type of criminal is very clever—very ingenious," the professor started to explain.

"But, why should he want to kill Gould?" Hennessey interrupted.

"That I can't tell you. It was revenge, I'm sure, but why or what—well, you'll have to find that out for yourself."

Hennessey got up and went to the telephone. He dialed a number and stood nervously making clicking noises with his tongue until the party at the other end answered.

"Hello," he said, "gimme Brooks." There was another short wait and then, "Hello, Brooks. Hennessey talking. Look through the files and see if we got anything on a Joe Foley. Runs a recording studio. Yah. Better check his whole family. O. K.? Swell. Call me at Professor Ogden Wright's home. What do you mean am I working on the murder? I got it solved. Sure. Get to work on the Foley stuff and call me back."

HENNESSEY pulled a fresh package of cigarettes from his pocket and broke the seal. His face looked more relaxed.

"Looks like we're maybe on the right track, huh?" He looked at nurse Chesley and smiled.

"You got a smart patient, there," he said.

"He described Foley exactly," she replied.

"Yeh?"

"When you were out getting the pic-

ture, he told me how the murderer would look," the nurse explained, "and he was right."

Professor Wright beamed. Hennessey walked over to him and leaned against the bed.

"Now, tell me," he said confidentially, "how'd you do it this time?"

"Endocrinology again," Professor Wright explained. "It's very simple. The glandular indications in this case are fairly obvious. This Foley is a perfect specimen of the thymocentric—that's a person with an overfunctioning thymus gland. Ordinarily, this thymus gland, which is situated near the heart, stops functioning when a person is about 17 years old. But, if it continues to function, it produces a criminal who retains certain childish faults—often dangerous faults. The sending of the telegram was impertinent and childish. Having himself photographed with leading criminologists, and devising such an infantile murder device as a poison needle! That's the sort of thing a child remembers from reading penny-thriller detective stories. Do you follow me?"

"Well, yeah, that last part I get," Hennessey said slowly, "but I never could understand all that gab about how the ductless glands secrete juices that make a guy either a saint or a sinner. I know a lot about a lot of things, but I still don't know nothing about them ductless glands. And you been giving me the dope on them for three years now." He paused to take a long drag on his cigarette and then he said, "On the level, professor, can you really figure this stuff out by glands?"

"There is no other way."

"Well, you been doing all right with it."

"**M**OST criminals are usually hyphenated," Wright continued,

"that is, they have combinations of endocrine gland disturbances. This electrician, Foley, was also a subparathyroid—that is, his parathyroid gland was not functioning as it should and secreted an insufficiency of parathyroid fluid."

"But how could you tell he was a subpara . . . whatever you said," Hennessey insisted.

"You said the murder was committed in the dark. That is typical of the subparathyroid."

"O. K. if you say so, but how could you tell from that what the guy looked like."

"There are certain physical conditions which occur when the parathyroid is not functioning as it should. Foley's bad teeth, and especially the fact they were widely spaced, plus the lopsided appearance of his face, plus his pinched expression—all these things are present in a subparathyroid murderer."

Nurse Chesley moved closer to the foot of the bed.

"You mentioned, Professor Wright," she said, "that the man would be bald. Is that part of a subparathyroid deficiency, too?"

"No, that belongs to the thymocentric. But Foley is a combination, you see."

There was a faint whirr of the telephone bell and nurse Chesley answered it. She handed the phone to Hennessey. After listening for about five minutes, he hung up and turned to the professor.

"You win again. That was Brooks. He didn't have nothing on Foley himself, but it seems Foley's brother killed a Gold-coast millionaire in a hold-up about two years ago and Lester Gould was hired to find him. So, of course he did and Foley's brother was burned in the chair."

"Then the motive was revenge,"

Wright said.

"Guess it must be." Hennessey grinned. He pulled a cigarette from his pack. "Well, I better be getting along before Foley confesses and someone else gets the credit."

"He won't confess orally," the invalid assured him. "Thymocentric-subparathyroids seldom do. They aren't the type, you know. But he'll

have written a diary or he'll write a long dissertation on the perfect crime."

"Swell. Then I'll have time for a coke." Hennessey lumbered out puffing vigorously at the cigarette. The invalid closed his eyes and here was a faint smile of happiness about his lips.

"I'll have my medicine now, nurse Chesley," he said.

THE END



(Continued from page 6)

know what we mean when you've finished reading it. You just can't hurt a story like this even with a play on words. The odor of this story will remain in your memory a long time—pleasantly!

ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM is back this issue with another short story, "Alihi in Reverse." It's about a killer who gets out of stir and goes out for revenge. He fixes himself up a perfect alibi, and then wishes to hell he hadn't! This was one time a good alibi was a handicap. But you read it and find out for yourself.

COMING back once more is Leroy Yerxa with another short-short about officer O'Sheen. This time O'Sheen solves a murder because he knows a dog is a dog.

WE SAID something about a kid named Leonard Raphael in our last issue. Predicted he'd make his alma mammy orphan asylum proud of him . . . Well, he did exactly that, and further, he's back again with "Mystery of the Crushed Peppermints" to prove it was no flash in the pan.

A RATHER unusual story is Helmar Lewis' "The Mental Bloodhound." It's about a detective character who is confined helplessly to his bed but who solves crimes by deduction simply because he is an expert endocrinologist (gland scientist to you). We think you'll like the way this fellow operates. Plenty of scientific fact back of this story.

LEIGH BRACKETT, who, incidentally is of the weaker sex (so-called), gives us "Murder in the Family," and a pretty swell job of it too. Several of the girls appear in this issue, the first

time it's happened in MAMMOTH DETECTIVE! Betty Pierce has a minute mystery, and Elsie Winthrop has a fact article. So you see, the ladies are invited to add to our book's high quality! Keep coming in, girls!

WE WANT to recommend Arthur Nelson's story "Death Proposes to Nick Fane." It's a very neat hit, and we rather like this character. He's a dashing lad, and we rather liked the break he got when this very dazzling dame proposed to him (with bullets on the side). Of course, it was all a deal, and it would all be off in the morning, but a gal just can't monkey around with Nick Fane and expect to have her heart intact afterward! But Nick, too, almost had his nicked, by a hunch of guys who objected with mysterious insistence, to his marriage; only the nicking in his case was with assorted cutlery and hardware! Which is a hell of a wedding present!

NORMAN WHYTE had dogs in mind too when he wrote "A Man's Best Friend." We guess he proved that's so in this story, but that's not the real point—the fact is, he proved he can write a swell yarn, and we guarantee he'll be back in our pages whenever he turns out one like this! Keep coming, Norm.

THE other day Leonard B. Rosborough walked into our office and asked what we were going to do with his story, "Three for Tea." It seems we had it on our desk, and hadn't done much about it—except publish it! It's in this issue, Leonard, and we hope you'll be back with more like this one. At first, we didn't like your old lady character, but as we read deeper into the story, we found out she was quite a smart operator!

SOMEHOW it seems okay for a headless woman to be dead. Anyway she ought to be dead! However, none of us ever really believed those carnival exhibits were anything but fakes—and we can well believe K. Webster when he yarns a story about the murder of a headless woman. It can be done, and in a very unusual way. Read the story "Death of the Headless Woman" and find out.

THIS issue we have another true story, this time by Wally Wood. It tells the facts in one of the mystery stories of today which has never been solved. It's "The Case of the Unclaimed Corpse." Said corpse being that of Val Ravoldi who arrived in town shortly after his body, just in time to walk in on his own funeral. The identity of the duplicate corpse has never been established.

OUR "unusual" story for this issue is Thomas Thursday's "Give the Guy a Chance." We've heard a lot about how hard it is for ex-convicts to get along after they return to decent ways. Well, here's a story about one ex-convict who found a way to do it—with a strange twist to it.

"RED BLOOD AND GREEN SOAP" get all mixed up in Dale Clark's story. It's a bad rap for a traffic patrolman to have an accident victim die on his hands because he failed to apply a tourniquet properly. But this copper knew he hadn't failed to apply it the way it should be, and in the process of finding out just how it happened, he ran into the sweetest mystery of his career.

TO FINISH up our lineup of stories, we have Frank Marks' story about a woman who wasn't too scared to foil a Nazi—or maybe she was scared enough to foil him. You'll like "Ma Bingham Meets a Nazi."

MAYBE you've noticed that this issue's contents page is something that takes almost as long to read as a story? We have plenty of interesting features this month. For instance, three minute mysteries instead of one. You readers have shown you like these little stories, and like to try your hand at solving them. These three, plus the usual back cover picture mystery, give you four chances to play detective.

THE author presented this time is C. S. Wallace, author of "Murder Enroute." You'll get a kick out of his little autobiography and you'll see that he knows what he's writing about.

SPEAKING of minute mysteries, we were pleased to see so many of our readers taking a crack at collecting that ten bucks. So pleased we paid out three tens this time. But we'd like to have even more of these contributions. Why don't you all sit down and try to figure one out? Sure, many of them will come back to you, but who knows, maybe you'll find out that playing detective can be creative, and that you'll cash in on some of the cleverness you've practiced in solving these same mysteries.

CONTINUING his blazing way toward real fame, our little skip-tracer, Wilbur Peddie once more knocked off top honors! How in heck

can a little guy like that loom up so big? Well, anyway we're tickled to know you readers like the little fellow so well. Too bad he isn't back this issue. But author Browne tells us Peddie can't be rushed. What about it readers?

SECOND honors went to that amazing hunk of blubber, Hank Fletcher. Your editors will never understand how either of these two characters happened to take hold so instantly. But maybe we just aren't good judges of "character." Sadly, Hank isn't back this issue either, but we have Alexander Blade's assurance that he "sure as hell" will be in future issues.

ONCE more our front and back covers are painted by Robert Gibson Jones. We think that this lad is an artist for our money any day—and we feel that the present issue's covers are no let-down over his previous successes. Ordinarily, readers do not go out of their way to comment on the cover—but you did on these works of Jones. Incidentally, he asks us to thank all who wrote and complimented him.

ANY of you regular authors who happen to read this column, here's something you ought to scan carefully. The readers say we have the best detective book they've ever seen, and that our stories are the best they've ever read. Now, it seems to your editor that a book like that would be a heck of a good one to crash, and keep on crashing. So, if you've read this, why not read the stories in this issue, and get some idea of what we like, and send something in? We want stories from 1000 to 70,000 words long. But, boy, they gotta be good!

WE ALSO invite you readers to take advantage of our Correspondence Corner, which is free to you. It has proven very successful for all those who took advantage of it, in securing pen pals. Another department for your use is the Personals columns, where we air your problems. Several of these problems have been solved through our pages. And lastly, we have a department, not in this issue simply because no one took advantage of it, called "Wanted: These Heirs and Missing Persons." Both photos and descriptions of missing persons will be published.

FOR a long time safe-builders were absolutely unable to build safes that could withstand safe-crackers for even a couple minutes. Incredible as it sounds, safe-crackers had developed the use of the "oxygen lance" to the point where they could cut through granite and reinforced concrete and the toughest steel yet invented like a red-hot bullet going through butter. The "oxygen lance" would go through ten inches of solid steel in *thirty-five seconds*. Fortunately for our bank accounts, an alloy was finally invented which is practically impregnable.

(Concluded on page 177)

MURDER



A girl's body was jammed between the stone tiger's jaws

IN THE FAMILY

By LEIGH BRACKETT

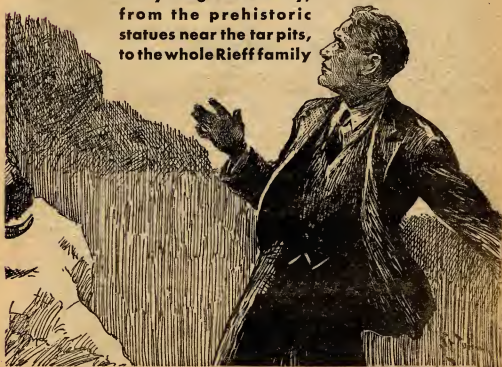
DANNY THAYER walked through the La Brea Tar Pits that night because he was looking for a place to sleep, free. He wasn't thinking about anything in particular. His brain had grown rather numb these last few days.

He was hungry. So hungry it felt like rats chewing inside of him. Maybe he could forget that, if he went to sleep.

Have to watch out for a cop, though. The signs at the park entrance said, "Closed to Public after Sundown."

The Pits stretched out before him, a great barren sweep of weeds and scrub and baked earth dotted with clumps of dark trees and the pits themselves where scientists had dug up fossils, and white scattered glints where stone sculptures of prehistoric beasts

**Everything was screwy;
from the prehistoric
statues near the tar pits,
to the whole Rieff family**



loomed in the cloudy moonlight.

Danny Thayer shivered. He was nineteen, homeless, jobless, and hungry, but he could feel the loneliness of the place. It was more than just empty. It was—ancient.

Wilshire Boulevard was just beyond the wall of eucalyptus trees and ornamental shrubs. The lights of Hollywood painted the clouds off to his left. But they seemed a million miles away.

He walked on. Just walking, a tall lanky kid trying to forget how hungry he was. Past asphalt funnels bubbling stickily behind low protective walls. Past the statue of a short-faced bear, and two ground-sloths, and across a choked and stagnant creek.

The path led between pits choked with reeds higher than his head, over a low stone bridge. There was a thick clump of trees up ahead. The place had a sullen, biting smell. It seemed to be waiting, somehow. Waiting, and hungry.

Then, sharp and sudden in the dead silence, a woman's voice cried out.

"What are you doing? No! Oh God, don't . . .!"

And she screamed. It was a short scream, choked off abruptly in a sort of gurgle, like thick muddy water between stones.

Danny stopped. Something like a strong cold hand held him, still and not breathing. Then he started to run, toward the clump of trees ahead, his feet ringing hollow on the stone bridge.

He stumbled out of the path between the trees. The moon was playing hide-and-seek in drifting clouds. And someone was running, fast, toward the Wilshire entrance.

Someone in a dark suit, with a dark head bent. Running doubled over, so that in that light you couldn't see size and shape.

Danny Thayer yelled, almost as

though his throat had done it alone.

The someone stopped, jerked around like a puppet on wires, already shadowed by the barrier trees. The moon broke out, clear and bright. For an instant they stood, the figure in the shadows, the boy clear in the cold brilliance. Then the dirt path was empty.

Danny stood still, his body needed with sweat, choking on his own heartbeats. The sullen pungence of the pits seemed suddenly triumphant, as though what they'd waited for had come.

He turned toward where the scream had come from.

There was a stone group under the trees, showing a bison mired in a pit and two sabre-tooth cats fighting over the carcass. One of them reared up over four feet, his head thrown back, fangs bared impotently while the other tore his throat.

Only now his fangs weren't bared. They were buried deep in a woman's throat.

A woman's throat, wedged with savage strength into the gaping mouth. The cat's fangs were metal, because they were too long for crumbly stone.

Metal. Not very sharp. But sharp enough.

CLOUDS nagged at the moon. Danny's heart beat full and slow and very loud. He shivered, and the veins in his neck hurt.

She was small and slender, bent backward and hanging from the cat's mouth. She wore an evening gown of some pale, shining stuff, tight across her small curved breasts. The blood had made a dark, glinting pool between them.

She must have been pretty, without her face so twisted and her eyes empty and staring. Her hair was dull gold against the stone.

It was very still and lonely there, and the pits smelt of death.

Danny put out his hands and tried to get her loose. But the curving fangs were hooked hard against her jaw. She was dead, anyway. Apart from the bleeding, the jerk of her body downward had snapped her neck.

He drew back. He wanted to be sick, but the retching was agony to the emptiness in him. And then he saw her purse, a little scrap of satin and seed-pearls, dropped in the dust beside one small foot.

He stood quite still, looking at it. His bony hands opened and closed. He could still feel her flesh against his palms. Warm, but already cooling. Warm, but dead.

Just a dime, for a hamburger. It was stealing. But she wouldn't need it any more. Maybe it wasn't wrong to rob a person when he didn't need money any more.

Danny's jaw was long and jutting, covered with a dark soft stubble of beard. It set suddenly, hard, and his blue eyes narrowed.

"The hell with right or wrong! She's dead. And I'm hungry."

He stooped and caught up the purse and opened it. A roll of bills fell out into his hands. A thick, fat, solid roll of bills. Not the sort a girl carries in case of taxi fare.

Danny stood there, staring at it. And suddenly there was light in his face that wasn't moonlight, and a man's voice yelling.

Danny Thayer reacted from sheer brute instinct. He dropped the purse and lurched back into the shadow of the trees, and ran.

A whistle shrilled. Heavy boots pounded on the baked earth. A voice yelled, "Stop or I'll fire!" A prowler car must have stopped out on Curson Street, too far away for him to hear. The regular patrolman, clearing bums and lovers out of the park.

Danny ran. Fear lent him strength. Stumbling, staggering, doubled over with his back-muscles tight for the rip of a bullet, he raced around the pit where the bridge was, sheltered by the reeds.

He ducked in among the low walls. Something cracked like a dry branch behind him and there was a nasty whining sound over his head.

There were two sets of boots pounding, now. But the second cop, summoned by the whistle, was way behind.

The gun cracked again. Dust and splinters exploded from the wall beside him. It was hard to breathe, and his feet weren't sure.

He broke suddenly around a big pit with a sort of pump-house built over it, doubling back under the shelter of the tall cattails that choked the creek. The creek ran back almost to the Sixth Street side of the Pits. If he could make it . . .

The first policeman went into the tangle of low walls, carefully, lest Danny have a gun. Danny tried to go quietly, but he couldn't control his feet. His breath was hot and it had a saw-edge to it.

The second policeman, way behind the first, saw him.

HE LET out a whoop and pelted across the shortened distance. He must have thought the boy was wounded, the way he was running, for he held his fire. Danny moaned and struck out for the shrubbery bordering Sixth Street.

The first man vaulted a wall and came running. Danny could hear their boots hitting the ground. They were going to run him down, because they were strong and not hungry. They were going to take him. They were going to arrest him for murder, because he'd been standing by a body with a

purse in his hands.

Murder for robbery. Twelve men, and the gas chamber. And he didn't have even a description of the killer.

He was suddenly furious, the fury of an animal cornered and in pain. He grabbed up a big clod of earth and whirled around and threw it. His thin young lips were snarling, and his eyes were queer.

The leading policeman reached the creek. There was a gap in the reeds there, and he jumped. The clod took him, then, in the face. He lost his footing and crashed down, his head going under in strangling, acrid stuff, half water, half pure asphalt.

Danny ran on.

The other man yelled at him, and fired. Bullets kicked the dust, but he was weaving from sheer weakness, and the light was bad. They missed. He staggered into the shelter of the trees and looked back.

The cop had had to stop and pull his mate out of the creek. And now there were people coming into the pits from the Wilshire entrances, drawn by the whistles and the shots. He'd have to stay there, to guard the body and whatever clues there might be.

Danny Thayer stumbled on. No one was walking on Sixth Street at that hour, and the few cars went by fast. Nobody saw him, in the shadows. He went across into the grounds of a swank nursery, and then down on his knees in a dark corner, his breath knifing his lungs, his heart slamming his ribs like a hammer.

Far away a siren began to wail.

He had to get on. There'd be a cordon. He'd been a fool to run away. But his body did it without asking his mind, and then he'd been afraid to stop. Now nobody'd believe him.

But would they have believed him anyhow? A kid, broke and starving,

standing beside a dead girl with his fists full of money?

Money. Bills, a thick roll of them, clenched in his sweating hand. He'd taken it, then. Now they'd never believe him. Never.

Money. Something he'd prayed for, with his belly crying for food. Blood money, to buy him the gas chamber. He got up, whimpering, and raised his hand, as if to throw it away.

But he couldn't throw it away. It meant bus fare, to get away from here, quick. It might save his life. And it meant food. Just one full meal, before they caught him.

He began to rip feverishly at the bills. Got to hurry. Sirens. God, let them be small. Fives, tens, twenties. A lot of money. Why was she carrying it? A fiver. He pulled it out, and a scrap of paper fell at his feet.

He scooped it up and began to run again.

Out onto Wilshire Boulevard. Slowly, so as not to attract attention. Sirens, coming fast. Fairfax Avenue. There was a bus coming, heading toward Hollywood. People were beginning to stop and look for the sirens.

He sprinted across the intersection against the lights and caught the bus. The driver grumbled about changing the five, digging for dollar bills. The sirens screamed closer. Danny forced his hands to be steady, taking the change and dropping a dime in the box.

They started, jamming through on the caution light, the driver still sore about the change. They were in the last batch of cars through before the cordon closed around Wilshire and Fairfax.

THE bus was half empty. Danny sat by himself, trying not to sob when he breathed, trying to look peaceful. The roll fitted into his hand in his

pocket, hard and accusing.

When they got as far north as Santa Monica Boulevard he began to relax a little. He got off there and went into a Log Cabin and ate. Then he took a red car and caught another bus on La Brea and went on to Hollywood. He went to three more drive-ins before he'd had enough to eat. He didn't dare have it all in one place, for fear of drawing notice.

Then he went out onto Sunset Boulevard, not knowing where to go next, or what to do. And for the first time he was really afraid.

He'd been afraid back at the Pits, with the hot animal fear of death. But this was different. This was being lost in a dark, cold place, where there was nothing but silence and waiting.

The night fog was coming in, chilly and smelling of the sea. It made little halos around the glare of Earl Carroll's. He could see people inside and hear music. The two big radio buildings across the street and the Palladium Ballroom radiated life and energy.

People, eating and drinking and having fun. Working. Fighting, maybe. But not afraid. Not behind a wall, like he was.

He sat down on a bench, shivering. The roll of bills made a lump against his thigh.

The policeman had seen him pretty clearly by his flashlight. There'd be a description in the morning papers. They'd get him. They always got you.

The cop he'd hit wasn't dead, anyway. He'd moved and tried to get up when the other guy helped him.

If he could have caught the killer, or even seen his face. That girl, so little and golden-haired, with her throat ripped and jammed against those snarling fangs—and they thought Danny Thayer had done it!

How the killer must have hated her,

to take her living throat in his hands and force it down. . . . What could a girl like that do to make anyone hate her so?

Surely, if he gave himself up, they'd know he couldn't have done a thing like that. But somebody might say, "You hated her because she had money and you were hungry, so you killed her."

Now he had money. Sure. Money. Money to buy the gas chamber.

It wasn't till then that he remembered the bit of paper.

It was still in his pocket. He spread it out under the lights from Earl Carroll's. Pencilled in a hasty, angry scrawl were the words, "This is all I can give you, ever, no matter what you do. Damn you, damn you, damn you!"

Danny turned the paper over. It was a strip torn from a department store sales slip. There was a name and address on it. Miss Cicely Rieff, who lived on Fountain Avenue.

The dead girl. She'd been taking that money to someone. Blackmail, sure as shooting. She must have been pretty desperate when she rolled the money up, to grab the nearest paper and scribble a note like that and wrap it in the heart of the wad.

Was the murderer the blackmailer? Maybe. The girl must have known him, to go into the Pits alone with him after dark. But why did he go off without his money, then? Had Danny scared him?

Danny Thayer, who was a fugitive from justice, with a roll of bills he couldn't spend. Danny, who was going to die in the gas chamber, unless . . .

Unless he could catch the murderer before the police caught him.

CHAPTER II

IT WAS almost as though his brain took hold and began to click with-

out him, like a machine. He had clues—the note, the money, and the girl's name and address. He knew he wasn't the killer. That was more than the police had.

There hadn't been anything else in the girl's purse. Maybe it would take the police a little while to identify her. Until the morning papers came out, maybe, and somebody saw her picture.

It had been nearly ten when he found the body. It was nearly midnight now. Four or five hours he might hope for. Four or five hours to break into something from the outside and catch a killer.

It was hopeless, and he knew it. But it was better than just waiting, crouching in the dark with fear lying cold in his belly.

He'd still be in trouble, of course, even if a miracle happened and he did find the murderer. He'd do time for stealing and hitting a cop. But he could face that all right. It was the terrible fear of dying, for something he didn't do, that froze him.

He got up, thinking of the description the cop would give. There was a service station across the street. No body saw him go into the men's room and lock the door. He still had his cheap razor. Nothing for that in a hock shop.

He managed to scrape his face pretty clean, using just soap and water. Then he used the blade to chop his hair shorter. It looked ragged, but at least it was short. Then he did what he could to make his clothes look decent.

When he came out he looked different enough so that cops hunting for a shag-haired, unshaven kid wouldn't grab him straight off. He forced himself to walk with jaunty casualness, trying to keep in shadow without being too obvious about it.

It was well after midnight when he

found the Fountain Avenue house.

It was one of those big old frame places—two stories and a half—left over from better days. A porch overgrown with bougainvillea ran around two sides. It was on a corner and there was a sign in the front bay window—**ROOMS FOR RENT.**

There were only one or two lights upstairs. That meant the police hadn't identified the body yet. If they had, the place would be blazing and full of people. He went around to the driveway. It led between high lattice fences, grown heavy with morning-glory vines, back to an old stable that was a garage now, with an apartment over it.

There were no lights in the back. Danny went softly down the drive. His heart was jumping like something trying to break loose.

The fog was heavier, but there was still moonlight. Everything was overgrown with vines and shrubs. It smelt musty and secret, and the lattice-covered back porch was a black hole with the garbage cans like ogre's eyes looking dully from under it.

He stood still by the corner of the house, then. He was here, but what next? He couldn't break into the house, yelling, "Who killed her?" The sharp chill of the air got inside him, and he felt the terrible, helpless weakness of an animal in a trap.

He went on, aimlessly, around the house. Noises came suddenly down to him from the garage apartment, so that he jumped and crouched trembling under a bush. A man's low thick laughter and a scuffling sound, and one sharp high titter in a woman's voice, and silence.

Danny crept on, still sweating with shock. He went along a dirt path between straggling flower beds, looking up at the dark house, wishing he were like Superman and could look right

through walls.

Probably the killer wasn't here at all. If he was, there was no way to get at him. He might as well go and give himself up, now.

He didn't see the summer house until he almost ran into it. It was lattice like the fence, at the end of a pergola leading to a side porch. It was all choked with vines, smelling dusty and rotten in the damp night air.

And there were people inside.

A MAN'S voice spoke, right at Danny's shoulder, just beyond the vines. A low voice, smooth and drawling and soft, and somehow worse than if it hadn't been.

"I just want to know where she is, Frieda."

"I tell you I don't know!" It was a woman this time, breathless, frightened, almost crying. "I haven't any control over Cicely."

"Very well, Frieda," said the man pleasantly. "I'm in no hurry."

"I don't understand." The tone of the woman's whisper did something to Danny's insides. "Teddy, if you've harmed her . . ."

"Why should I harm Cicely? Just because Mother doesn't love her darling niece?" There was a rustle of swift movement and a sharply indrawn breath.

"Don't, Teddy! It hurts!"

The man said silkily, "Does it? I'm glad. Just remember it, in case . . . What's that? There's someone outside!"

Danny got up and ran. A big moth had blundered suddenly into his face, so that he jerked his head and struck the vines and rustled them. He dodged into the shadows of a big tree and around it to the garage, where steps came down from the apartment.

Feet were running close behind him.

He knew he'd have nightmares about running feet all the rest of his life. He'd slip behind the garage to the street, and then . . .

There was no way behind the garage, and the fence was too high to get over in time. He was caught.

He turned, then, his bony young face snarling, his fists balled. Scared, and angry because he was scared, and furious suddenly with fate for picking on him. A tall slender man in slacks and a sport coat was almost on him, running gracefully, like a dancer.

Danny lashed out at a smooth blond head, missed because the head moved aside a fraction, and felt something crash below his left ear.

He went sprawling, the breath knocked out of him against hard ground. A hand gripped his collar, dragged him upward, strangling, and then knuckles slashed him twice across the mouth.

The darkness turned suddenly red. Danny made an animal noise and doubled his feet up and kicked. The blond man grunted and lurched back, his handsome face twisted like a fiend's in the moonlight.

The girl cried out sharply, then. She'd been a long way behind the man. Now she got between him and Danny, and said rapidly:

"Wait, Teddy! Don't! It's my friend Dick Taylor, from back home."

Teddy scowled down at her, his fists clenched and showing blood on the knuckles. "You're lying," he said.

"I'm not, I swear it! Dick, you tell him I'm not. Dicky!"

Danny's brain was numbed with anger and pain and wondering if the girl was crazy. Almost without thinking, he mumbled, "Sure I'm her friend. Who'd you think I was—Hitler? Hi, Frieda."

Lucky he'd heard her name. Teddy

stood irresolute, swinging his fists in little tight arcs, like a cat swings its paws. And then the door opened, up above at the head of the stairs.

A MAN came out. He was wearing a big coat and carrying his hat, and his feet stumbled on the wooden platform. He said thickly, "G'nigh', Princess. Thursday, huh?" He chuckled and turned, and then he saw the group at the foot of the stairs.

Danny saw his face for one stricken moment. Then the man slammed his hat on and pulled it hard over his face and ran down the stairs, hanging onto the rail and stumbling until Danny thought he'd fall. He shoved past with his head down and went lurching down the drive.

Danny knew who the man was. He made a lot of money, kissing pretty women for the movies.

A woman came out of the door upstairs. She wore a thin silk robe, and she was a looker. She leaned over the rail, with her dark hair hanging over her shoulders, and blew a long plume of smoke. Her voice was tired and bored.

"What goes on?"

"Nothing," said Frieda. "Just a friend of mine from back home. He hitch-hiked all the way out here, and then Teddy . . ."

Teddy's voice was sullen, but still smooth. "What's he doing prowling in the yard at this time of night?"

Danny's brain had been churning furiously. The girl must have her reason for this. And it gave him his chance to get inside. The least he could do was play up to her.

He got up, wiping the blood off his chin, and said, "Trying to get hold of Frieda. I'm broke, and I didn't think the landlady would let me in, the way I look. Sure quick with your fists,

aren't you?"

"Quick," said Teddy softly, "and accurate."

The woman in the silk robe came down the stairs, her slipper heels clicking. Her legs showed white against the darkness.

"Spoils," she said bitterly, and let something glitter in her hand. "Now I'll go find the old highbinder."

"The intricate pattern of crime," said Teddy, almost absently. "So much more fascinating than a jigsaw puzzle. Isn't it, Frieda?"

Frieda didn't say anything. Danny had his first real look at her. She wore something plain and dark, and she wasn't very tall. Her hair was the color of wheat, falling loose on her shoulders.

He thought her eyes were blue, but in that light all he knew was that they had hate in them. Hate, and fear, looking at Teddy.

"Come on, Dick," she said. "I'll get you a room."

He followed her. Out in the street a motor roared and coughed, as though someone were in an awful hurry to get away. And a light went on in the second story, as though the motor was a signal.

Teddy laughed behind them, a soft nasty little sound. The woman in the silk robe plodded up into the black hole of the porch. And Frieda shrank suddenly against Danny and cried, "What's that?"

There was something sprawled in the shadows of a clump of hydrangeas. Danny hadn't seen it before. But the moonlight had shifted a bit, and one white hand showed up against the grass.

A man's hand, lying across the dull metal of a gun.

They went to it, not speaking at first. Teddy knelt down and rolled the body partly over by the shoulder. The

woman in the silk robe made a little choked scream and came back, her heels scuffling.

"It's Halstead," said Teddy. "Somebody's knocked him on the head."

Frieda said, in a queer flat whisper, "My God. Who would want to kill poor Mr. Halstead?"

Teddy's eyes were slanted like a cat's, glinting in the moonlight. He pointed to the gun. "Who did poor Mr. Halstead want to kill? Can't guess, can you, Frieda?"

Frieda pressed tight against Danny, so tight he could feel the roll of bills in his pocket digging into her. She shivered and said wearily, "Haven't you any heart at all?"

The woman gripped her thin robe together at the throat. "I'm getting out of here. The other I'm used to, but murder . . . !"

Teddy got up, dusting his knees. "No use, Princess. The police don't like the contestants running out on their quiz shows."

Policemen. Policemen coming from one murder to another and finding Danny Thayer. There wouldn't be any time, now. They'd recognize him. Frieda would admit her lie. And if he ran away . . .

He was scared. Cold inside, and scared, and kind of dazed, like an animal when it finds the steel jaws in its leg are there to stay.

THE porch door opened. A woman's harsh whisper said, "Get in here, you fools! Want everybody . . . My God, what's that!"

"A corpse, Mother," said Teddy. "Your late boarder, Mr. Halstead." There was a malicious, concealed amusement in his easy voice.

The porch door shut. A woman scuffed heavily out from under the shrouding vines and down the steps as

fast as her heavy bulk could make it. Her frizzed white hair stuck out, quilled here and there with curlers. When she came across the wet grass she pulled up the straggling skirts of her nightgown and flannel wrapper, and Danny saw her ankles, thick and white and bunched with veins.

"He must have had a heart attack," she said. "A heart attack. His heart was weak, you know." Then she saw the gun and stopped, her breath wheezing in her thick throat. "Suicide?"

"He hasn't been shot. And I don't think he cracked his own skull." Danny saw the cat-glitter of his eyes, studying the woman, laughing.

"We'll have to call the police," said Frieda. Teddy shot her a bright, hard look, and smiled. He was handsome, like a blond Satan.

The fat woman said rapidly, "No, wait. Maybe he cut himself falling. Let's get him inside—" Then she saw Danny. Her voice went suddenly ugly. "Who's this?"

"I'm a pal of Frieda's, from back home." Her eyes were like small hard pebbles, staring right through Danny. They made him tighten inside. But she was scared, too. She didn't want the police. If he could bluff this through, hang onto his chance. . . .

Her face was like a coarse, evil mask of stone in the moonlight. Danny could sense her thoughts running like rats behind it. Then she said, "All right. Grab hold of his feet and help Mr. Rieff."

Teddy Rieff. The dead girl had been his cousin, then. Danny got the corpse around the knees. Everything was quiet. The people in the front hadn't heard. The dead man was heavy, and his clothes were damp. Teddy pocketed the gun.

They went in through the dark porch, to a stale-smelling kitchen. A night

light burned in the hall beyond. They went toward it, as quietly as they could, across a bare, creaky wooden floor.

They were almost there. And then a door opened suddenly, right at Danny's shoulder, so that he almost dropped the body. Dim light from the hallway outlined a woman's head against the darkness.

Hair flattened in wet curls under a net, with a face the shape of a pear sagging out from under it, a wide weak mouth and eyes that popped a little. Eyes that were wide open and staring, fixed on the dead man's bloody face, lolling back against Teddy's stomach.

CHAPTER III

SHE didn't speak. Danny didn't know how long they stood there. Then Mrs. Rieff said sharply,

"Go to your room, Princess. I'll see you later."

Princess went out, holding her silk robe away as she passed the corpse. And Mrs. Rieff moved, very quickly for a heavy woman.

Her right hand clamped just above the staring woman's elbow. Her left smothered the whimpering cry of pain. She whispered savagely,

"You know about this, Millie, don't you?" Her fingers tightened. The woman strained away, her pale eyes stretched with fear.

"Tell me," said Mrs. Rieff softly, "or you'll get no nights off for six months."

The woman made a strangled whimpering sound and tried to nod. Mrs. Rieff took her hand away. Millie started to speak, her mouth open as though once started the stream of words wouldn't stop.

"Not here!" snapped Mrs. Rieff, and shook her viciously. "Upstairs, and be quiet!"

Down a dingy hall and up back stairs

that must have been worked on lately, because they didn't creak, Mrs. Rieff opened a door and motioned them in, listened a minute, and then came after them.

Lamps made a subdued purplish light. Danny guessed it was Mrs. Rieff's room. There were photographs and expensive knickknacks all over the mantel and the tables. It was all crowded and choked and overdone.

He helped Teddy Rieff put the body down on a couch. Mr. Halstead had been a kindly-looking man, grey-haired and tired. There was a bruise and a big cut on his face.

Danny straightened up, waiting. He put his hands in his pockets to steady them, and the roll felt big and hard, like a judge's hammer when he passes sentence.

He saw Frieda looking at him. A queer, desperate look. And then Mrs. Rieff's pebble eyes were fixed on him.

Her face was coarse and puffed, with red broken veins under the skin. Danny was afraid of her, suddenly. She said sharply,

"So you're a friend of Frieda's, eh?"

"Sure. My name's Dick Taylor. I hitch-hiked out here, and landed broke. I wanted to get hold of Frieda first. I didn't think you'd let me in, the way I look. I . . ."

"Well, you're in now." There was something terrible in the slow, reflective way she said it. "Frieda, where's Cicely?"

"I don't know." She was pretty, now that you could see her face. She looked tired and sort of stony. Danny felt suddenly protective.

Mrs. Rieff smiled. It was like Teddy's smile, catlike, malicious and secret. She turned suddenly on the staring, pale-eyed woman.

"All right, you, Millie. What about this?"

Millie licked her lips. She seemed drugged and dazed with fear. She stood utterly still, her big rough hands hanging, staring at the sprawling corpse. She wore bright green silk pajamas and a pink wrapper and pink slippers of quilted satin.

Her mouth worked for a long time before the words came, ragged and tumbling.

"I was coming back from the trash-pile. I saw him, hiding in the bushes. He was waiting . . ."

"What were you doing at the trash-pile at that hour?"

"I—please, Mrs. Rieff, I only took two slices. Don't!"

Mrs. Rieff did, with relish. "Stealing bacon again, and trying to hide the grease. Well, stop rubbing your stupid face. Go on."

Millie's pale, protruding eyes swung again to the body.

"He had a gun," she whispered. "He looked sick. He told me to go away, but I knew what he was doing. He was waiting to kill Miss Cicely. I heard him tell her he would, if she didn't let him alone."

Her big rough hands knotted together suddenly. "He wouldn't stop. So I hit him with the skillet, on the head. He—he made a funny choking noise and fell down. I was scared. I ran, inside . . ."

Millie crumpled slowly down to her knees, staring straight ahead of her, her hands loose in her lap.

"I didn't mean to kill him," she said dully. "I only didn't want him to hurt Miss Cicely. She's kind to me. She's the only person that ever was kind to me. She gives me pretty things, and money enough to go to two movies on my night off."

She looked up then, with something bright and burning in her eyes.

"You all hate her," she said. "You

all wish she was dead. But she's kind to me. And no one's going to hurt her, if I can help it!"

She relaxed, as though there was nothing left in her, and just sat there, tears running silently down her flabby cheeks.

Teddy had been bending over the body. He spoke now, rapidly.

"I DON'T think this whack was hard enough to kill him, Mother. Stunned him, probably, and he raked his face on the bushes, falling. The old boy had a weak heart. Probably the strain of planning the murder, and getting caught, and the blow, brought on a fatal attack."

Mrs. Rieff looked down at the body with hard, narrow eyes.

"So Cicely was blackmailing him, eh? Clever girl. Let that be a lesson to you, my son. Only a genius would have looked for profit in that dried-up old priss!"

She laughed suddenly, a startling wheeze of private mirth, and settled heavily into an overstuffed chair.

"Get up, Millie. Go to bed. And if you open your mouth about this, I'll swear you killed him. Just forget Mr. Halstead, Millie. And you can forget your night off this week, too, so you'll remember the bacon."

Millie said, "Then I didn't really kill him?"

"No. But I can swear you did. Now go and dream of Clark Gable."

Millie got up. She looked at Mrs. Rieff with dumb, weary hate, like a beaten animal, and went. Mrs. Rieff said briskly.

"That's that. We'll forget about the gun. Halstead had a heart attack and hurt his head falling. We brought him in, but it was too late. Teddy, you and the kid carry him to his room and then call a doctor. Make all the noise you

want to. We want witnesses."

She got up and took the gun out of Teddy's pocket and wiped it carefully. Then she pressed Halstead's stiffening fingers on it, in several places, wrapped it in a handkerchief, and gave it back.

"Stick it in one of his drawers. If he had a license they'll look for it. If he hasn't, well, we don't know anything about it."

She looked at Danny, with her hard, flat pebble eyes, and said, "Then you can have Number Eight, here in the rear. Any friend of my niece's—we don't want you to get away too soon."

Teddy smiled. "Welcome to our happy home. Grab his feet again."

Danny did. Frieda started out with them, but Mrs. Rieff said, "Stay here, dear. Two of them is enough."

Frieda shot him a veiled, urgent look and stopped, reluctantly. They went on with the body, through a door that closed the back part of the hall off from the front. They made a lot of noise. Presently there were people swarming around, talking, questioning, staring.

They got Halstead into his room. Teddy palmed the gun somehow and got somebody busy calling a doctor and went out again with Danny. Danny was only vaguely conscious of what went on. His brain was spinning like a squirrel in a cage, and making about as much progress.

The things he had found out, instead of simplifying the problem, had only made it harder. Cicely Rieff had been a blackmailer. The servant said everybody hated her. Halstead had been driven to murder.

Who else in this house was Cicely blackmailing? And who had been blackmailing her? And what about?

Frieda, who must be Cicely's sister, was afraid of Teddy Rieff. Why? And was there really some pleased and

secret knowledge in Mrs. Rieff's eyes, or had he just imagined it?

The girl Frieda was the pivot. If he could be alone with her . . .

TEDDY RIEFF closed the hall door behind them. "The Great Divide," he chuckled. "The back is strictly family territory. The boarders even have to garage their cars elsewhere, and there are no keys to the back door given out."

His slanting cat-eyes were fixed sharply on Danny. "Therefore you are the first outsider to see what you have seen."

He meant about the apartment over the garage. Danny grinned. "I know how to keep quiet. Say, I'd like to see Frieda before I turn in. Been a long time, and we were pretty chummy."

"Sure," said Teddy. "Four years is a long time. How are things back in Kansas?"

"About the same," said Danny warily. Teddy stopped before a door and opened it, snapping the light on inside.

"This is your room, kid. Suit you?"

"Sure, anything." He wanted to see Frieda, alone—and quick. A siren wailed suddenly over on Sunset, and his guts knotted tight inside him. But it went by. He started off down the hall.

He didn't even have time to turn. The swift movement behind him melted right into the chopping blow on the side of his neck. His heart seemed to close up on him, and his body just folded, heavily.

He didn't quite go out. He felt Teddy's arms like lean steel cables around him, and knew dimly that he was dragged and lifted and stretched on something. He began to struggle then, glaring up at Teddy in a sort of

dazed fury.

But it was too late. He was spread-eagled on the bed, tied wrist and ankle to the brass posts. Teddy smiled down at him.

"Frieda's only been out here two years," he said gently, "and she came from Michigan. Better start talking, kid."

The blood thundered in Danny's head. It hurt, and he couldn't think. He whispered, "You go to hell."

"Inevitably. But not just yet." Teddy's long fingers twisted cruelly in Danny's hair, lifting his head. "What's between you and Frieda? Something about Cicely?"

Danny wasn't afraid now. Just mad. He thrashed his head about and tried to bite Teddy's wrist. Teddy laughed and slapped him, just hard enough to make his ears ring.

"Okay. We'll do it the hard way." He whipped his handkerchief tight around Danny's jaws to keep him from yelling, and went through his pockets.

Then he stood silent for a long minute, looking at the roll of bills and the crumpled paper with the note and the address on it.

HE POCKETED them at last, slowly, and bent over Danny again. His handsome face had deep, cruel lines in it.

"She's dead, then."

Danny nodded. No use trying to hide that any longer. Teddy ripped off the gag.

"What do you know about this?"

Danny burst out, "Nothing! I was just walking through the Tar Pits, looking for a place to sleep. I heard a woman scream, and saw someone running away. Then I found the body, and the money—and then the cops found me. They think I did it."

"They do!" said Teddy softly. His

hand closed on Danny's shirt collar, pulled him up ruthlessly to the reach of his bound arms. Teddy's cat-eyes were pale and cold and yet somehow blazing. He said, "Did you see the killer?"

"Only someone running."

"Man or woman?"

"Someone in pants. Dark hair."

"Dark hair. You're sure of that?"

Danny looked at the light shining on Teddy's smooth blond head. "You could have worn a cap," he said grimly.

Shot in the dark. He shivered, looking at Teddy's face.

Teddy laughed. A soft, secret little laugh. "Yes. I could, couldn't I?" He let Danny down again and replaced the gag.

"Just lie still, little one. Daddy has business to attend to. Oh, yes. Big, important business. And I need you!"

The lights went out. Teddy opened the door and closed it softly behind him, and Danny Thayer was alone.

He lay there with the blood pounding in his bruised neck, his legs and arms beginning to ache where they were tied, and thought, "He did it. He did it, and he's going to pin it on me."

His brain began to click over again, like a well-oiled engine. What motive could Teddy Rieff have for killing his cousin Cicely? Well, Cicely was black-mailing at least one other person so that he was willing to murder her. Why not Teddy, too? Or Teddy's mother?

Teddy's mother. That apartment over the garage, Princess, and the prominent actor. Mrs. Rieff was prosperous. Boarding-house keepers don't get that way solely from the boarders, and women who run small apartments over garages don't get that way splitting diamond bracelets with the girls. There's another, quicker way . . .

Blackmail. You always came to blackmail in this house. Ten to one

Mrs. Rieff blackmailed the men who came to the rear apartment. She'd want to keep her skirts clean, though, in case of trouble. She took plenty of precautions. It wouldn't be easy to get anything on her.

But suppose somebody did. Wouldn't she rather split her profits than be exposed or give the whole thing up?

All right. Say Cicely Rieff, her niece and therefore admitted into the family circle, had proof of Mrs. Rieff's business and blackmailed her with it. Remembering Mrs. Rieff's heavy face and hard pebble eyes, Danny didn't think she'd take it too long. She'd get busy figuring out a way to rid herself of the blackmailer.

She wouldn't do it herself. She'd delegate someone else. And who better than her son, Teddy? Just like, a few minutes ago, she had said, "We don't want you to get away too soon," and Teddy had smiled . . .

Perhaps Frieda Rieff knew too much. Perhaps that was why Teddy had threatened her in the summer house.

Danny groaned. Just guessing wouldn't do him any good. He had to have proof. Time, the little time he had, was rushing by. And here he was, trussed up and waiting.

Waiting. Remembering Teddy's long sinewy hands, Danny shuddered. And then, very softly, somebody opened the door.

CHAPTER IV

DANNY lay quite still, hardly breathing. His nails dug into his palms, but he didn't feel them. He watched the dark huddled bulk come in, saw the door swing shut again, and listened to feet scuffing stealthily across the carpet.

A match flared and sputtered startlingly, close to his face. And Millie's

voice, hushed to a hoarse whisper, asked, "Are you all right?"

All the strength poured out of Danny's rigid body. He said shakily, "Sure. Untie me, quick. What are you doing here?"

The match went out. He could feel her rough fingers fumbling at his wrists. Her voice came raggedly, as though some great pent-up emotion in her forced it out against a barrier of fear.

"Miss Frieda sent me. She upset a vase on her dress, so she could get away from the old woman for a minute to change it, and she sent me up here. She thought they were going to do something to you. She needs your help. That's why she lied about knowing you."

Millie's voice broke in a dry sob. "I heard through the wall, waiting in the next room for Teddy to go away. Poor Miss Cicely! She knew they wanted to kill her. She was afraid. I know she wasn't bad! She was kind to me, and I loved her."

She had one wrist free and started on the other. Teddy had tied hard knots in the handkerchiefs he used. Her voice stumbled on.

"I heard Mr. Halstead threaten her yesterday, and the old woman was in a black fury all day. I know Cicely was asking for more money, and I know she was in trouble. She hasn't been herself ever since Frieda had to go back to Michigan on business, four months ago.

"I wanted to help her. But she'd never tell me what was wrong. Anyway, there was nothing I could do. There—never has been."

Wrists free, and both of them working on ankles lashed tight with leather belts, Millie's shaken voice went on again.

"She was frightened, I tell you. She

gave me three dollars this morning, and then she said, 'This may be the last money I'll ever give you, Millie. If anything happens to me, Frieda—' And then Mrs. Rieff came into the kitchen and she stopped.

"I think she was going to say that Miss Frieda would give me things. I don't think so. She's a nice girl, but she lives inside herself so much. But I don't care about that. I loved Miss Cicely. She's the only person I ever had to love."

Danny was glad it was dark. He hated to see women cry. He said, "Why haven't you left this place, or called the police?"

"I didn't have anything to call the police about. The old woman's careful about that. I'd only have gotten Princess and Miss Cicely in trouble. Besides—" She helped him off the bed, and he could hear her throat working, trying to keep the terror and the tears in check.

"Besides, I didn't have anyplace else to go. I'm not young. It isn't easy to find a place these days. Mrs. Rieff knows that, and she knows I'm too dumb and too scared to fight her."

Her voice dropped suddenly to a strange tight whisper. "Only this time I'm not. They've killed Cicely, she and her wicked son. They've killed her. And I'm not going to let them get away with it!"

Danny said awkwardly, "Come on, then. We'll get Frieda."

His hand was on the knob when Millie's fingers closed sharply on his wrist. He heard them, then. Slow, heavy footsteps, coming closer.

"The old woman," whispered Millie. "Maybe she's coming to make sure."

They waited. No time, no place to hide or get away. There was sweat on Danny's temples. The footsteps stopped outside the door. He could

hear her heavy breathing beyond the thin panel.

The knob turned in his fingers.

THE barrier door down the hall opened, and a voice said, rather timidly, "The doctor's here, Mrs. Rieff."

She said, "All right," and let go of the knob and went on. Danny's knees sagged. He waited until the outside door closed, and went out.

There was nothing in the hall but silence and the dim glow of the night light, until they reached the door of Mrs. Rieff's room. There were voices behind that, low but not very guarded, as though they were sure of not being overheard.

Frieda's voice, tight and shaken, saying, "What a filthy trick! You were blackmailing your own mother."

"Naturally. Lucrative work, if you can get it. Of course, I knew it wouldn't last forever. That's why I kept asking for more, and Cissy had to shake more out of the victims in order to meet all her—er—obligations. Naturally, the victims began to kick. The last raise was just the final spur."

He laughed. "This will be a shock to mother. She trusts my filial devotion so completely!"

"And that boy?"

"That boy," said Teddy softly, "is going to be a scapegoat. I'm going to tie all his little curiosities to his horns and run him straight back to the police—dead."

There was a queer sharp edge to Frieda's voice, a stillness. "And what about me?"

"Now that this game is played out, I'm thinking of taking over Mother's business and enlarging it. I want . . ." He seemed to move closer to the girl, and his voice dropped so that Danny couldn't hear.

Frieda's voice came suddenly, sharp and harsh. "No! You devil, I won't do it! Teddy, you . . . oh!"

Danny said quietly, "Millie, go phone the police. I'm going in there."

He still had no direct, incriminating evidence. Teddy's implied confession wouldn't be enough to condemn him. But Danny figured he'd have at least a chance this way. And he couldn't let Teddy just go on. Cicely had already died. Frieda might be next.

Millie gripped his arm tight. "Be careful—and I hope this'll mean the rope for both of 'em!"

She went off down the hall, almost running, her bright green pajamas flapping around her thin legs. Danny, very quietly, opened the door.

They didn't see him come in, for a moment. Teddy had his back to Danny, his hands on Frieda's arms below the shoulders. She had changed into a dark blue wrapper with a long gold arrow on the collar. She was straining away from him, her eyes blazing out of a face white and hard as scraped bone.

Teddy murmured, "You'd be a pretty woman, Frieda, if you weren't such a blasted martinet!"

She said something, so low and hissing that Danny couldn't get it. Then she saw him, coming up behind Teddy. Her blue eyes widened.

Teddy turned swiftly, his handsome face startled and wicked as a blond Satan. Frieda cried out, "Help me! Please help me!"

Danny said evenly, "I'm just waiting for the chance."

It was the first time in his short life he'd ever felt real hate.

HE WENT in on Teddy Rieff, watching the poise of his blond head, the swing of his fists and shoulders. His first blow just grazed Teddy's

jaw. He twisted to take the counter-blow on his shoulder, crouched, and slashed upward.

His fist smashed into a belly tight and hard as board. It jolted both of them. Then a roundhouse swing connected with Danny's ear. He went down, grabbing at Teddy's knees, pulling him off balance and into a table loaded with china and glass.

It went over with a crash. Frieda had closed the hall door and was standing flat against it, watching with wide, bright eyes. Teddy cut his hand on a broken vase, and there began to be red splashes over the rug and Danny Thayer.

There wasn't much science to it. Danny just hung on, punching, kicking, grappling. Teddy was heavier and experienced. Danny's long rangy frame hadn't reached its real strength yet. But Danny had made up his mind to one thing.

This time he wasn't going to be licked.

Teddy's knee ground agonizingly into his belly. Hard knuckles slashed and pounded at his face. His mouth was full of blood and his ears roared. He set his teeth and twisted like an eel, grabbing out blindly.

He got Teddy by the shirt collar. The cloth was stout. Danny's arm was long, and his position gave him leverage. He dragged Teddy over, heaving his body underneath to break his balance. His eyes were swelling and full of blood, but he could feel.

He twisted the collar tight, working his fingers like a bulldog's jaws, in and in, his head sunk and his back humped to take Teddy's blows.

Teddy swore, viciously, between his teeth. He was dragging at Danny's wrist now, but Danny's long bony fingers were tangled in the cloth, twisting, twisting. Teddy lurched back and

up, shaking himself.

Danny kicked at his ankles and brought him down again, hard. He got his other hand on the collar and his knee on Teddy's right arm. Teddy's left hand raged at his face, clawing. Danny put his head deep between his shoulders to save his eyes, and then Teddy found his ear.

Danny screamed, and Teddy laughed, a sort of strangled gurgle. Danny flung himself downward suddenly. Teddy's nails slipped out of his ear. His right arm came free as Danny's knee moved with his body.

Danny lay flat on top of Teddy, grinding his fingers in, twisting the cloth tighter and tighter. He could feel the hard, straining cords of Teddy's throat, the softer spot beneath the Adam's apple. He began to get scared. He didn't want to kill.

Teddy's nails were ripping his shirt and the flesh under it. He tore away suddenly and loosed one hand from Teddy's throat and brought it crashing down against his temple.

Teddy's hands faltered. Danny flailed his fist down twice more. Teddy Rieff lay still, breathing hoarsely through his mouth.

Danny got up. Very slowly, waiting for the pain to break through the numbness. Through a wavering red curtain he saw Frieda.

"Tie him up," he said thickly. "Keep him. Police . . ."

The golden arrow on her collar flashed at him. "Police?"

"Coming. Millie sent for them. Teddy killed your sister . . ."

"Yes," she said. "Yes. I know that. Are you all right?"

"I guess so." He wiped the blood out of his eyes and swallowed what was in his mouth. Teddy was groaning on the floor. Danny said, "We'll have to take care of his mother somehow. Lock the

door, maybe. Keep her out till the police come."

Frieda nodded and turned the key. Teddy looked awful, bloody and choking on his breath. It scared Danny. What if Teddy died?

He was Danny's only proof of innocence. There was no direct evidence against him. But the police would at least investigate, might find some, might even force him to confess.

But with Teddy dead, at Danny's hands . . .

HE WASN'T dead. He was tough. A little blood didn't mean much. Danny pulled himself together and helped Frieda tie him with curtain cords.

Then he just sat, looking across at Frieda. Her hair looked even paler against the dark blue robe, gold and shining like the arrow on her collar. Her eyes were very blue. She smiled tremulously, and said,

"This is what I prayed you'd do. I've been so frightened. My sister—wasn't good to me, and Teddy . . . I didn't know anyone to ask help from, and when you came, I—you might have been killed. Can you ever forgive me?"

He waved a bruised hand awkwardly. "You gave me my chance. The cops think I killed your sister."

"Teddy told me about that."

"How did the old woman let herself get blackmailed?"

Frieda shrugged wearily. "Cicely's been working on it ever since we came out here to live with Aunt Grace. Our parents died, you see. Cicely never told me much, but I think she got a candid camera shot of Aunt Grace—Mrs. Rieff—taking a necklace from Princess. It didn't mean much by itself. But Cicely had a case all built up in her mind, enough so that my aunt didn't want to risk an investigation."

She caught her breath suddenly, looking toward the door. "She's coming back."

Danny got up and went to the door. Fear began to knot his insides again, he didn't know why. She was a woman, and locked out. But there was something about her, about her eyes . . .

Her heavy footsteps came up and stopped outside, and for the second time that night the knob turned under Danny's fingers. He said, "The door's locked, Mrs. Rieff. It's going to stay locked until the police get here."

There was a startled intake of breath, and a silence. Then her voice came, ominously quiet.

"Have you hurt Teddy?"

"He'll be all right. Only he's staying here, for the police."

And then, sharp and taut behind him, Frieda screamed.

Danny whirled around. Frieda was half crouched over Teddy, her hands pressed over her heart. She looked up at him, slowly.

"He's dead," she whispered. "You've killed him."

Danny went forward, three wavering, leaden steps. Teddy lay utterly still, not groaning, not breathing. His lips were blue. Mrs. Rieff called from beyond the door, but Danny hardly heard her.

He stood staring down at the body. His bony hands opened and closed slowly, still feeling Teddy's living throat against them.

Teddy's throat. Cicely's throat. They'd never believe him now. "Frieda. Frieda!"

The girl looked at him, dazed.

"Frieda, you'll tell them how it happened. You'll tell them . . ."

She crumpled down gently at his feet, lying like a tired child with her cheek on her hand, the arrow glinting on her breast.

It was then that Mrs. Rieff came in. There must have been another door into the hall. She came slowly through the bedroom door to Danny's right. She carried a snub-nosed automatic, with a silencer on it.

CHAPTER V

HER eyes were like small polished bits of steel, sunk deep under heavy lids, seeing everything. Teddy's battered body. Blood splashed over the carpet. Danny, standing on wide-braced feet, beaten and torn and half stripped, wild with numb terror. And Frieda, lying quiet, her wheat-gold hair burning against the rug.

Without speaking or letting the automatic waver a fraction of an inch, Mrs. Rieff bent down and put her free hand on Teddy's throat, feeling for the pulse under the jaw. Then she pulled back an eyelid and gave one swift, keen look.

She got up. Her heavy face was almost expressionless, but Danny's heart twisted in him like a scared animal.

He whispered, "I didn't mean to kill him."

"That's too bad." Her voice, held tight to a level, throaty whisper, betrayed what she was feeling. "That's too bad!"

Time, the room, the universe, shrank in on Danny Thayer so he could hardly breathe. The focal point of the whole cosmos was Mrs. Rieff's finger, tightening on the trigger.

He said, stupidly, "Teddy killed the girl. He was going to kill me. I had to . . ."

"I know. I sent him to do both."

Danny backed off a step. She followed, Death in a nightgown and a flannel wrapper, with curlers in its hair. She said softly, "I want to kill you. I want to kill myself, for killing my son. And even if I didn't, do you think I

could let you leave this house alive after all you've learned this night?"

"They'll get you for killing me. They'll be here soon."

She laughed, softly. "Look at this room, and you, and—Teddy. Who'll blame me for shooting a crazy killer, already wanted?"

"Frieda. Millie. They'll tell . . ."

"I'll take care of Frieda and Millie."

The automatic came up, steadied, rock-like in her thick hand.

Danny said, "Wait. Did you know Teddy was blackmailing Cicely and keeping the money? Your money?"

Her hard pebble eyes blinked. "You're lying."

"Why do you think she was demanding more and more money? Just yesterday, so that you and Halstead both wanted to kill her on the same night. Look in Teddy's pockets. You'll find the bills I stole from the body, and a note."

"You're a fool. Teddy wouldn't have left money on her body, even if he had been lying to me."

"I frightened him away, running across that stone bridge."

Her eyes were ugly with pain and hate. She was only listening with the top of her mind, watching him, thinking how he was going to die.

"What stone bridge?"

"In the La Brea Pits, where he killed her."

"You're crazy," said Mrs. Rieff dreamily. "He drove her car off the road into Coldwater Canyon."

The round black eye of the automatic was staring at Danny's heart.

He dropped, twisting sideways back of a chair. The bullet sang just over his head and thunked into the plaster wall. He cried out:

"I tell you he killed her in the Pits! He jammed her throat down into the mouth of that sabre-tooth cat. For

God's sake, look!"

PERHAPS missing her shot had shaken her a little, or perhaps the truth was naked in Danny's voice. She bent, slowly, never taking her eyes from the chair where the boy crouched, and felt Teddy's pockets.

Danny could see part of her, under the chair. He saw her hand draw the bills out and hold them for a minute, and he listened for a siren, praying. But there was only silence.

Mrs. Rieff whispered, "You did. You lied to me, Teddy. You said you couldn't get anything on her to make her stop. That's why we had to kill her."

Then her hand dropped the bills and lay for a moment tenderly on Teddy's face. "It doesn't matter now."

She got up. "It doesn't matter now, does it, you there behind the chair? They're both dead now, and it doesn't matter!"

Danny, under the chair, watched her thick white ankles come slowly toward him. Beyond them was Frieda, lying still, the golden arrow glittering softly as she breathed.

Frieda knew what Teddy had on Cicely. She could tell the whole story of Teddy's double-cross. But she was out. And it didn't matter, anyway. They were both dead, and he was going to be.

The ankles stopped beyond the chair. He could see the veins on them, blue and bumpy. His long jaw stiffened. If he got up suddenly, and pushed the chair over into her . . .

Frieda stirred, just the faintest contraction of the muscles, and the golden arrow shot a wicked barb of light into his eyes.

Danny's muscles tightened. There were fragments of glass and china on the floor from the table he and Teddy

had knocked over. He got a handful, caught a deep breath, and surged up.

The chair crashed over, almost into Mrs. Rieff's knees, so that she had to move back. And the handful of fragments shot out like shrapnel from Danny's hand.

They struck Frieda Rieff full in the face and neck. She cried out and sprang up, startled and furious, her face twisted into a devil's mask frighteningly like Teddy's.

Danny shouted, "Don't shoot. I didn't kill your son. She did!"

FOR a long moment there was silence.

Then Frieda began to cry softly, the look on her face gone so swiftly that it might have been imagination. Mrs. Rieff said, almost soundlessly:

"What are you trying to do?"

"Save my neck," said Danny. She had her balance again. She could shoot, any time. Frieda was standing with her face in her hands, her wheat-gold hair falling over them, shaking a little.

Danny said, "Frieda was faking. She was waiting for you to kill me. That way I'd take the blame for both murders."

"That's not true." Frieda's voice was a broken, childish sob. "I did faint. When I came to I was scared. I just lay there. How can you say I killed my own cousin?"

For an instant Danny was shaken. She was so soft, so lovely, so miserable. Mrs. Rieff saw his hesitation. She said:

"You're stalling."

Faintly, then, there was a siren wailing. Far away, but coming. Sweat needed Danny's face.

Frieda burst out, "How could I have killed Teddy? You were right with me all the time. And there's no mark on him you didn't put there!"

"Frieda," he said quietly, "where does that golden arrow belong?"

Her hand flew to her collar, slid down slowly to her breast. "No place in particular. Anywhere. Anywhere I want to put it."

Mrs. Rieff said slowly, "It's always on the collar. It was on the collar half an hour ago. Why did you move it?"

"I don't know. What difference does it make. Why do you want to treat me this way?"

She crumpled into a chair, crying. Mrs. Rieff was staring at her with hard pebble eyes. Danny took a chance. He walked over to her and pulled her head back by the wheat-gold hair and said:

"When I was standing at the door with my back turned you took the gold arrow off your robe. What did you do with it, Frieda?"

"I—nothing. I didn't know I did it. Aunt Grace!"

Mrs. Rieff stood still, watching. Danny reached down suddenly and unfastened the pin and held it up.

There was blood, just a tiny smear of it, in the joint of the pin. A brass pin, five inches long, and sharp at the tip.

SHE sat there, quite still, her face hardening like soft clay glazing in the kiln. Danny said slowly:

"You couldn't stab him to the heart with that. You didn't open a vein. But . . ." He knelt suddenly by the body, looking down into the battered, bloodstained face. He found what he was looking for, and felt sick.

"Through the eye," he said. "Into the brain. She thought a little prick like that would never be noticed, in the corner of the eye."

Mrs. Rieff looked down, and then up again, at Frieda. She shrank back, her eyes wide.

"I tell you I didn't! He's lying. Why should I kill Teddy?"

"Because," said Danny, "you killed Cicely, too, and he knew it."

He felt suddenly weary. He didn't even get up from the corpse. He just squatted there, and heard his voice run on.

"You've had bad luck tonight, haven't you, Frieda? You lost your temper and killed Cicely. I saw her body, and I know you lost your temper. Then I scared you away from the money, and you weren't sure I hadn't seen you.

"You saw me. I forgot that. When I turned up here you were scared. Maybe I'd recognize you. I had the money, too, and you wanted that. You felt it in my pocket when you leaned against me out there in the yard, when we found Halstead.

"Only there was Teddy. You wanted to use me against Teddy, and you succeeded. But Teddy got the money first. He knew then that Cicely was dead, that he hadn't killed her, and that left only you.

"Because he knew all about you, Frieda. He tried to force you to come in with him. Then I knocked him out and tried to keep him for the police, and you knew he'd have to tell the truth in order to save his own neck. So you killed him, with the only weapon you had—that pin.

"You aren't very used to murder, though. You got flustered, between doing it and putting on an act for me, and you got the pin back in the wrong place. You'd have been all right, if it hadn't been for that. But I saw it was wrong, and I wondered why, and all of a sudden a lot of things lined right up and made sense."

Mrs. Rieff said, "You don't make sense, kid." But she wasn't going to shoot. She was looking at the gold arrow.

"I didn't," said Danny wearily.

"I'm a hell of a detective. I was fooled, like everybody else, into thinking Cicely was a hard-boiled blackmailer. I went on from there and built up a perfect case against Teddy, just like everybody else. I was almost right, too.

"But I was an awful dope. I swallowed that picture of Cicely you all had, and didn't pay any attention to the Cicely that Millie knew. A gentle, kindly girl who was scared out of her wits and knew something was going to happen to her.

"Would a hard-boiled criminal show all that to a servant? Wouldn't she do something about it? She'd apparently done enough before. And what could Teddy have on her, to make her pay blackmail?

"I didn't think much about that, either. I guess I thought he was threatening to expose her to the police. But he couldn't have done that. He was in too deep himself. So it had to be something else—*someone* else that Cicely was afraid of.

"I'd never have guessed who, if Frieda hadn't been forced to kill Teddy."

MRS. RIEFF still hadn't moved, but her hard little eyes were intent. Frieda hid her face in her hands. Her voice came small and soft and piteous:

"You're mad! Cicely's always dominated me. I don't know what was between her and Teddy, but I didn't kill her! I wouldn't have the strength. And you said yourself the killer was a man."

"I thought so. I'm used to thinking of pants as masculine. But—Cicely was awfully small, and you're no weakling, Frieda. What did you do with your dark slack suit, Frieda, and the thing that goes around your head and covers up that blond hair?"

She didn't answer, and Mrs. Rieff said, "Yes. Where is it?"

"I gave it away. Yesterday. The War Relief people."

"The police," said Danny, "can trace it, then. Especially with all that blood on it."

"ALL right!" Frieda was standing suddenly, her face white and hard, her eyes startlingly like Teddy's, narrow and cat-like. "I changed my clothes in my car. I wrapped the slack suit around a big rock and threw it in the sump of an abandoned oil well."

"Sure, I killed her. I didn't mean to. I've used Cicely since we were kids, making her do my dirty work and take the blame. She was useful to me. But she went soft tonight. She said she was going to the police, that she couldn't go on this way. I lost my temper . . .

"I was mad anyway. I found out about Teddy. He made love to her while I was gone, and the fool fell for it. He found out all about me, and used Cicely's fear of me to blackmail her. Pretty little set-up, wasn't it, Aunt Grace? Me behind Cicely, Cicely blackmailing you and Halstead and a couple of others, and Teddy milking the lot of us.

"Cicely couldn't keep it up. There just wasn't enough money for both Teddy and me. She had to confess. And by that time, Teddy was dangerous

to me. And the rest—well, you're pretty clever, kid."

She turned on her aunt. There wasn't any fear or softness in her. Just tough flexible realism, seeing, weighing, acting.

"What do we do now, Aunt Grace? If you go ahead and shoot the boy, we're both in the clear on those murders. If you shoot me, the police will get you. If you don't shoot either of us, I'll spill all I know about Rieff Blackmail, Incorporated, before I die."

"But if I shoot both of you," said Mrs. Rieff gently, "the boy will be saddled with three murders, and I'll be clear."

Danny hurled himself just as the silenced gun *plopped* softly. The bullet snarled past his ear, biting a little chunk of flesh from the cartilage. Then he had smashed into Mrs. Rieff.

She was too heavy to move fast enough. The gun spoke once more, harmlessly. Then Danny's fingers had crushed it out of her hand.

He sat down, then, holding the gun on two women who looked more like trapped wolves than women. The sirens screamed up outside the house, and stopped, and presently there were feet tramping through the house.

Big, heavy feet. And for the first time, Danny Thayer was glad to hear them.

THE END

PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION

IT HAS been said that the time is rapidly approaching when scientific systems of identification must be put in force for everyone. There is little doubt that already the needs of positive identification have passed beyond the walls of police stations and penitentiaries. The following are reasons why there should be positive identification of all persons:—

A. Failing to identify the dead may lead to costly and prolonged litigation over questions of inheritance, insurance, etc.

B. A person may contract amnesia or become temporarily insane and not be able to identify himself.

C. Injuries in consequence of accident, fires, cars, and other catastrophes, may so mutilate the victim that he cannot be recognized.

D. War time demands an "all out" identification in combatting sabotage, etc.

E. Fraudulent practices can be more easily overcome in business through a positive personal identification system.

Willis White.

SUPER SLEUTHS ON THE ARSON SQUAD

By T. BORR

EACH branch of the police department always claims that their men excel in apprehending criminals and of course each can cite cases that the men have solved. But probably one department that can lay true claims to having super-sleuths on its staff is the arson squad, for the men working out of this department almost always have to work with insufficient clues.

Take the case of the fur merchant who decided to cash in on his fire insurance when business was not so good. Since he specialized in silver foxes, he found it easy to get a large policy covering his stock. Soon after the policy was put into force, a fire started in his store and destroyed the whole stock of furs.

The arson squad took over the case and all that they could find on the premises were a few strands of hair. They examined them under a microscope and found that the hairs had a dark beaded appearance. A true silver fox hair would be black with a white border. A complete investigation on many furs was made and the investigators learned that the hairs found were from rabbit fur.

With this slim clue, the police finally obtained a confession from the furrier who admitted that he had substituted the rabbit fur for the silver foxes so that he could get the insurance and still have his furs. The arson squad soon convinced him that it's bad enough to start the fire, but it's definitely worse when you attempt to "eat your cake and have it too."

Another case was solved by the arson squad because one of the detectives became suspicious of a wire. A house had burned almost to the ground while the entire family was away. A fire had been burning in the fireplace and all the evidence pointed to the fact that somehow or other the fire in the fireplace had started the blaze. Just as the case was to be closed, a fire detective discovered near the fireplace a burnt pine knot with several feet of wire attached to it. It was this clue which made the detective suspicious and finally brought about the conviction of the owner of the property for arson. The plan was truly a clever one. It seems that the owner had a dog that slept in a box situated in the living room of his home. The dog had been trained to leave his box by jumping over a low harricade. On the night the fire broke out, the owner had stretched a rope across the place where the dog jumped and one end of the rope had been tied to the wire that was attached to the pine knot which was burning in the fireplace. Thus when the dog left his bed, he tripped over the string pulling the blazing pine knot out of the fire into a pile of inflammable material that had been placed near the fireplace. The fire broke out hours after the

owner left home and this gave him an airtight alibi. If he had tied the rope directly to the pine knot instead of using the wire, his scheme might never have been brought to light. But all it takes is one simple clue for the arson squad to get their man.

Another case that looked like an unsolvable one was a fire that had broken out mysteriously inside a double sealed partition wall. While the fire detectives were making their routine check-up, they noticed a concave mirror had hung on a wall near the place where the fire started. The mirror had been placed so that the rays of the sun could strike it. The detective who discovered the mirror, obtained another mirror exactly like the one discovered and placed it in such a position that the sun's rays would be focused by the mirror on a plaster surface. When the heat from the focused sun rays ignited the wood behind the plaster without first igniting the plaster, the detective knew he had a solution to the case. When presented with the facts, the guilty person confessed. And so another "perfect crime" was solved by the arson squad.

During an arson investigation, a quantity of newspapers and three fruit cans partly filled with kerosene were found in the attic of the burned premises.

The owner was under suspicion because he had recently insured both the house and furniture. He emphatically denied any knowledge of the paper or cans and stated that they were not his property, as all his papers and cans were kept locked in his garage all the time. He also reported that the brand indicated on the labels was never used by him.

After investigating the garage, a large stack of newspapers and empty fruit cans were revealed. None of the dates on the newspapers found in the attic were the same as those in the garage. The only clue to work on was that one of the cans from the attic had been opened by a cog-type can opener. This type of can opener was found in the kitchen. In order to prove the opener in the kitchen was the one used on the can in the attic, it had to be used to open another can. A strip was then cut from the top of each can and the teeth marks made by the opener were compared under a microscope. It was possible to prove by use of the comparison microscope that the can opener in the kitchen had been used to open the can in the attic. It was an open and shut case against the owner.

Hundreds of other cases could be cited where the arson squad had cracked some mighty tough situations with only a slight clue to work on. Truly, the arson squad has super-sleuths working for it.

LOCKET FOR A

Morty Clock was dead, and in his hand was a locket that put Inspector North in a hell of a mess—if it were found!

THE midnight-to-eight detail was trickling out of district headquarters and the desk men were arriving. They met on the steps or in the corridors and lingered to swap gossip or discuss the Morty Clock case. But Inspector Harry North did not pause in his brisk sweep from his car to his office.

His approach cut a swath of stiff silence before him. The men broke off whatever they were saying, saluted him with faces blank, and took up their talk only when he was past.

It was always like that. Inspector North was never included in the easy informality of headquarters life. Even the Commissioner could get closer to the rank and file of the force. North didn't care. His job was to run the district, and few had ever accused him of not running it efficiently.

Lieutenant Floyd Bayer was waiting in North's office.

"Not a thing, sir," Bayer reported. "We worked on Hi Dawson all night. No soap."

North tossed his hat and coat on the coat-tree in the corner. "Keep at him and throw away your silk gloves. What about the locket?"

"We went through every inch of the apartment building. The whole business sounds screwy to me. Kenny swears—"

North's eyes went bleak. "Send Kenny to me."

"Yes, sir." At the door Bayer turned. "John Kenny has been on the force a long time. I wish you wouldn't be too hard on him."

"Put down that gun, Kenny," said North with ice in his voice. "Drop it, you fool!"



LADY

by
RUSSELL
GRAY



"I can get along without your advice," North said.

The lieutenant opened his mouth and closed it and went out. North eased himself into his swivelchair and set to work on the pile of papers on his desk. The door creaked open.

North glanced up, said, "You're suspended, Kenny," and resumed reading.

THIRTY seconds later North realized that he had not heard the door shut. He raised his eyes and scowled at Detective Kenny who stood in front of his desk. Unlike most cops, Kenny was all bones, and North could see a nerve throb in fury against the skin of his sunken cheek.

"What are you waiting for?" North said. "Go hand in your gun and shield."

"I've been on the force twelve years," Kenny said in a voice that shook. "If that doesn't mean anything around here, I'm a human being and ought to be treated like one. At least I deserve a trial."

"You'll get that later."

"Later!" Kenny mouthed the word bitterly. "Meanwhile I'm condemned."

Inspector North's cold gaze locked with Kenny's angry eyes. "At best you're inefficient, Kenny. That's enough for me."

"The law doesn't condemn a man until he's found guilty."

North leaned back in his swivelchair. He was a big man, his hips and waist squeezing the chair. But the meatiness stopped at his neck. His mouth was tight and thin; his nose sharp as the beak of a bird of prey; his eyes chips of blue ice.

"You'll be lucky if it ends with inefficiency," North said. "I wouldn't be surprised if you were found to be an accessory to murder. All right, what do you say about this? Shots were heard in the apartment house

where Morty Clock lived. A prowler car got there in sixty seconds, and about a minute after that Hi Dawson was caught trying to sneak out of the building. Officers Smith and Garcia took Dawson up to Clock's apartment, and they found Morty Clock on the foyer floor, shot dead. They searched Dawson. They didn't find a gun on him, but in his pocket they found a woman's gold locket, with half the chain ripped off. They didn't think it meant anything and let him keep it.

"You arrived with Homicide, Kenny, and the prisoner was handed over to you to watch. Then the M.E. found the rest of the locket chain clenched in Morty Clock's dead hand. But when Dawson was searched again, the locket was no longer on him. You're the only one who could have taken it, Kenny."

"How about Officers Smith and Garcia?" Kenny pointed out. "Why couldn't they have taken it?"

North shook his head. "They're the only ones who saw it. If they had taken it, they would have kept their mouths shut about it. Dawson denies he had the locket at all, so the fact it's missing must mean something."

"Why would I want it? Garcia says it wasn't worth more than ten or twenty bucks new."

"Blackmail, maybe. There could have been a name in the locket."

"Hi Dawson ditched it," Kenny insisted wearily. "Between the first time he was searched and the time he was turned over to me."

"Where?" North asked. "He wasn't out of the murder room after the locket was found on him. Every inch of the place was searched before he was taken out."

JOHAN KENNY put his knuckles on the desk. "At least give me a chance to find that locket, or to find out what

it means. I have the right to try to clear myself."

"Sure. Go ahead. But not as a representative of the force. What will I look like if I keep you on after that boner?"

"So that's it?" Anger again blazed in Kenny's eyes. "I'm to be the fall-guy. You're throwing me to the newspapers because they know something on the force stinks. They're saying that maybe a cop murdered Morty Clock. He was in the bail bond racket. He had an inside track at the precinct desks. That reporter, Denis Shea, says—"

North leaped to his feet and started around the desk. For all his bulk he moved with surprising agility. Kenny took a cringing step backward, half expecting a blow.

"Get out!" the inspector roared. "How dare you speak to me like that? By God, I'll break you!"

"I only meant—"

* "Get out!"

The door slammed behind Kenny.

North returned to his swivelchair and slumped down, breathing heavily. He hated himself whenever he allowed rage to overpower him. He lit one of his fat cigars and fingered the report on the Morty Clock murder.

Maybe Kenny was right. Maybe, without thinking it through, he was making the detective the scapegoat to appease the papers. Because lately Denis Shea of the Blade had been making it hot for the police in the form of a series of articles linking Morty Clock and the force in a gigantic bail bond racket. Shea claimed that Clock, a bondsman, had been tipped off on prospective bail customers even before arrests had been made, and that desk sergeants or lieutenants had then accepted worthless collateral from Clock to cover the bail. No names were men-

tioned in the articles save Morty Clock's, but Shea was promising more concrete revelations.

How much of it was true? It was odd how little a police inspector, spending most of his day at his desk, really knew what was going on in his district or other districts. The Commissioner had investigated and so had the D.A., but so far neither had got anywhere. Authentic collateral had appeared and the books had probably been doctored; there had evidently been tip-offs. And it was impossible to induce one policeman to give evidence against another. Even the honest cops had a code of honor about squealing.

HE FINISHED reading Lieutenant Bayer's report on the murder. Morty Clock had been murdered thirty hours ago, and the case wasn't moving. In fact, it had never got started. Any minute now Hi Dawson would be sprung, and the District Attorney's office refused to charge him. Winthrop, the D.A., was a stickler for the law and wouldn't make a move against Dawson because legally the evidence against him was a joke.

The telephone jangled.

"Hi Dawson is singing," a voice reported. "Thought you'd like to get in on it."

"I'll be right down."

North went into the washroom and had a long drink of water. He was feeling a lot better now. A prompt solution would take some of the heat off the department because of the bail bond rumpus.

As he was about to turn the door-knob, North heard a voice out in the corridor say: "That's why North is the most unpopular guy I know. The crooks hate him, which is okay; but the men who work under him don't get enthusiastic about him either. There's

not an ounce of mercy or understanding in his make-up."

That drawling voice belonged to Denis Shea, the Blade's top-flight police reporter, who for years had nourished the idea that his job consisted in riding the police department.

"Look what North did to John Kenny without giving him a chance," Denis Shea went on. "I know Kenny — a hard-working dick with a wife and three kids. If the murder is never solved, Kenny will be ruined. He'll never be able to free himself of the stigma North put on him."

North's grip tightened on the door-knob. So Kenny had gone straight to the newspapermen to complain! Well, no matter how the case turned out, he'd see to it that John Kenny was broken.

"You think Inspector North is part of the bail bond racket?" a second voice asked.

North recognized that voice also— Bob Roberts, a new man on the force whom Shea was showing the ropes.

"I'll bet my right arm he isn't," Shea replied. "North might be all kinds of so-and-so, but he's honest. That's the trouble with him. He lets what he thinks is a sense of duty get in the way of him being a human being."

"Then you don't think Kenny could be involved in the murder?" Bob Roberts asked.

"I didn't say that; only that North should have given him a break. Kenny could be involved, or those two cops, Smith and Garcia, who made the arrest, or some other cop. My articles were scaring the pants off Morty Clock. He offered me a juicy sum to lay off. That didn't help, so maybe he figured that if he talked, dragging policemen in with him, he'd be let off easy. There's been murder by cops before this in order to save their hides."

NORTH started to pull the door in, then checked himself. He remained where he was, listening.

"I still vote for Hi Dawson as the killer," Roberts was saying. "I mean, he's a crook and can use a gun and has two felony convictions marked up to him. He's worked for Clock in the past. After all, he was caught coming out of the building."

"And there were a couple of hundred other people in the house too. He was visiting a girl named Betty Lynch who lives on the floor above. There was no gun in the murder apartment, and Dawson had no gun on him. He couldn't have ditched it outside the house because he never got out, and the cops have searched the place from cellar to roof. A gun's not easy to get rid of."

"Like a locket, eh? Say, what about this Betty Lynch? If there really was a locket, it means a woman."

"Could be," Shea said, "though the cops can't tie her up with Clock. The fact remains that you'll find the best motive for rubbing out Morty Clock right here at police headquarters."

At that Inspector Harry North strode out of the washroom. Bob Roberts, a gawky kid just out of college, flushed, but Shea simply turned his lazy, freckled smile on North.

"Morning, Inspector," he greeted.

North jabbed out a thick forefinger. "I'm not going to tell you again, Shea. Stay away from my daughter. I know you were out with Lucy last night."

Denis Shea was a loose-jointed assortment of languid bone and muscle. His body seemed to be drooping even when he was standing upright. His flaming hair was perpetually unruly and his gray eyes seemed sleepy.

"Lucy's over twenty-one and I have a good job," Shea drawled.

"I know why you're after her," North

raged. "You figure on getting inside dope from her to smear the force in your muck-raking sheet."

Shea grinned. "You've nothing against me except that I'm against police corruption."

It was the slow, mocking voice that got under North's skin, and the grin as much as the words. North's big fist jerked up. Shea looked at the fist without turning a hair, but his smile was suddenly tight.

With a heavy grunt, North dropped his arm and brushed past the two reporters. At the moment he hated himself almost as much as he hated Shea. For the second time in twenty minutes he had almost struck a man in rage.

And he knew, as he walked down the stairs to the basement, that Shea had been right, that he objected to him for Lucy only because of those articles which were undermining the department. Everything Shea wrote might be true, but North felt about the department the way he felt about his own daughter. They were all he cared for in the world.

THEY were waiting for him in the sound-proof basement room. Roy Eagle, slim and handsome and youthful, was standing in a corner and scribbling on the back of an envelope. He was the district attorney's white-haired boy—the lad the papers were playing up because of some brilliant prosecutions.

Lieutenant Floyd Bayer, a veteran of the Homicide Bureau, was going over notes with Josephs, the stenographer. Detective Bingham was setting fire to a cigaret.

Hi Dawson occupied a wooden chair in the middle of the unfurnished room. His head was buried in his hands and silent sobs shook his skimpy shoulders.

"We have it all down, sir," Lieutenant

Bayer told North. "Want Josephs to read it?"

"Let Dawson tell it again and see if it's the same story twice."

A poke in the ribs from Bingham caused Hi Dawson to groan and raise his head. That thin, ferret face was unmarked, but the blood-shot eyes and twitching lips showed the pain of a tortured body and frazzled nerves.

"I didn't bump Morty Clock," Hi Dawson said in a cracked voice. "I was with Betty Lynch. When I said good-night, I thought I'd drop in and see Morty. He was in the same building and he'd been giving me jobs as a bail chaser. It's only one floor below Betty's, so I take the steps. I'm nearly at the door when I hear a couple of shots. I open the door and I see this broad running out of Morty's apartment. Then I—"

"Just a minute," North broke in. "Who was the girl?"

"Dunno."

"What did she look like?"

"I seen only her back. She was running down to the other end of the hall. There's another flight of stairs there. She was young; that I can tell you. Neat figure."

"She probably went out of the building without anybody noticing her," Roy Eagle said. "There are two exits, one on Maple Street and the other on Third Avenue. Right after the shots the place was a chaos, with everybody running about wildly. Dawson was stopped by the cops only because he had a record and they recognized him."

"Did you figure that out all by yourself, Sonny Boy?" North growled. He always resented interference from the D.A.'s office, and more than ever now because a kid like Eagle had been sent. "Go on, Dawson."

Eagle's mouth twitched, but he said nothing.

"Well, there's Morty Clock lying in the foyer of his apartment," Dawson continued. "The door's wide open. He's on his face, but there's blood coming out the side of his head, so I'm pretty sure he's dead. Somebody yells on the floor and I start to beat it, but I see the locket in his hand. There's nobody in the hall yet and it'll take only a couple of seconds. But he's holding onto the locket too tight, so I break the chain. Then I scam down the stairs."

"Why was the locket so important to you?" North asked.

"Well, I—I figured it would be worth some dough."

"All right. Then what did you do next?"

A GHOST of a smile appeared on Dawson's pale lips. He was obviously pleased at his own cleverness. He said: "Well, the coppers searched me for the gat, but they let me hang onto the locket. But I had an idea when they found the chain in Morty's hand they'd take the locket, so I slipped it into the pocket of the dick who was standing with me."

"Kenny?"

"Yeah, that's him. Then when he was riding to headquarters in the big sedan, I slipped it out of Kenny's pocket and stuck it behind the seat."

Lieutenant Bayer frowned. "That doesn't make sense. He admits himself the locket wasn't worth much."

"Depends on what you want the locket for," North said. "Blackmail makes it worth a fortune. A locket usually has a picture or perhaps a name. Through it he'd get a line on the girl he saw running away. He reasoned that we didn't have enough on him to hold him, and as soon as he got out he'd make it his business to get to the squad car and remove the locket. Then he'd bleed the girl white. . . . Isn't that

right, Dawson?"

Dawson feebly dropped his head. "You got nothing on me."

"You'll be surprised," North said. "As a starter, we hold you as a material witness on your own confession. Then we go on from there."

"How about a look at that car?" Roy Eagle put in. "If we find the locket, it will be proof that his story is straight."

"Not proof," North said, putting the young man in his place. "It won't clear Dawson by a long shot. It'll only show that there is a woman involved."

NORTH, Bayer and Eagle went to the police garage at the rear of the building. On the way Bayer said to North: "Well, anyway, that clears Kenny. I'd appreciate it, Inspector, if you'd let him come right back on my squad."

North laughed dryly. "The fact remains he let Dawson make a sucker out of him. Let Kenny cool off for a while. He needs a lesson."

"But, sir—"

"Let it ride!" North snapped.

One of the mechanics brought the squad car out to the center of the floor and flashed a light inside and pulled out the back seat. Roy Eagle, who was leaning through the opposite door, saw the locket first. He scooped it up by the chain. It was heart-shaped and gold, with the torn ends of a thin gold chain on either side of the eye.

Inspector North pressed forward, and his heart stopped beating.

"This is the kind that doesn't open, so there won't be a photo," Roy Eagle said. "Here's a monogram here on the face. L.N. Now who the devil could L.N. be?"

"Let's see it," North said, trying hard to keep his voice steady. He snatched it from Eagle.

Eagle said: "Watch out you don't

smear possible fingerprints."

"Don't be a sap," North said, feeling a hollow pit forming in his stomach. "Clock had it in his hand and the cop handled it; and Dawson. There'll be nothing but smudges."

Lieutenant Bayer leaned against North to get a closer view of the locket. "We'll make a check on all of Morty Clock's girl friends. If there's one with initials like that, we've got something. And I'll put a couple of men on tracing the locket through local jewelers."

"Yes, start the ball rolling," North muttered. He pulled out his pocket handkerchief and wrapped the locket in it.

"Hey!" Roy Eagle protested. "That's got to be turned over to the Property Clerk upstairs."

"Are you trying to teach me what to do with evidence?" North said savagely. "The Property Clerk will get it as soon as I get back."

"You're in headquarters now. You can't take it away with you."

North looked at Eagle. His mouth was tighter and thinner than it had ever been. "Maybe you'll try to take it away from me, Sonny Boy," he said softly.

The young assistant district attorney smiled. "I don't like being pushed around, Inspector. You've been doing it to me too long. I'm not so young that I don't know the law, and you're not so old that you've forgotten it. That evidence goes first into the hands of the Property Clerk."

"Not in this case it doesn't."

Eagle was practically laughing now. "My chief will like to hear this. So will the Commissioner." He left the garage, almost running.

Bayer said: "Inspector, do you think you ought to—"

"I'm handling this," North said wearily.

He turned and walked heavy-footed

to the rear of the garage where his own car was parked. A sense of being alone against the world overcame him. This was their chance—the newspapermen, the men working under him, the D.A. and Eagle, and everybody else who hated him. His twenty-eight years of service to law and order were crumbling under him.

And in his pocket the locket, which he had presented to his daughter Lucy on her last birthday, burned like a living coal.

THE bungalow was set far back from the road, behind a fringe of hedges and shrubs. North pulled into the driveway at the side and, as usual, entered through the living room French doors. Lucy had heard his car and was coming out of the kitchen. She wore a charming embroidered apron and her dark hair was gathered up in a single knot. North thought that she had never looked so sweet and attractive.

"Is anything wrong, Pa?" she asked anxiously. "It's only eleven o'clock."

Her face was peaked, her eyes tired and frightened. He recalled that she had looked like that yesterday, and when he had mentioned it, she had complained of a headache. He knew now that that hadn't been the reason.

"Why do you stare at me like that, Pa?" she was saying.

North removed his handkerchief from his pocket and spread it out on the table. "You should take better care of my gifts to you," he said hollowly.

She turned her back to him and went to the endtable for a cigaret and lit one. Then she sat down and crossed her legs and smiled up at him. It was a forced smile, wan and tenuous. She was either trying to be brave, North thought; or else was getting set to brazen it out.

"Where did you find it?" she asked.

"You know."

"I'm not sure."

"It was clenched in Morty Clock's dead hand."

She could not repress a shudder. "I was afraid it might be somewhere like that. When I discovered it was missing, later, I couldn't remember whether or not he had jerked it off during the struggle. I guess I was too panicky."

"So that's how it was?" North said. "You shot him in defense of your honor."

He gagged a little on that last word. It could probably bring her exoneration in a courtroom but he knew what the newspapers would make of it. Honor—when she had willingly gone up to Morty Clock's apartment!

THEN he realized that Lucy was staring wide-eyed at him. "Pa, you don't think I murdered him?"

"You were seen running out of Clock's apartment right after the shots were fired. You weren't recognized, but the locket means it was you."

"But I didn't fire those shots."

All his nerves tightened. "Go on," he said.

"My only crime was in being an idiot." She leaned forward with her elbows on her knees. "It started with Denis Shea's articles about the bail bond racket and a lot he told me which he hasn't dared print without additional proof. And the other night, when you bawled me out about going with Denis, you said his articles were undermining the department. Then last Saturday, while Denis was busy on a story, I went to a party alone—one of those helter-skelter affairs where everybody comes and goes. Somebody introduced me to Morty Clock, who happened to drop in, and Clock had the nerve to ask me for a date. I was

about to tell him what I thought of him, when I had an idea. Maybe it was crazy, but it struck me that if I could worm some concrete information out of him, you would get the credit for the arrests and Denis wouldn't write articles that would get you sore at him and everybody would be satisfied."

"Just like that, eh?"

"Why not? It was possible, wasn't it? And I admit that I thought it would be exciting. I wasn't afraid to be out alone with Clock because I knew he wouldn't dare try to get nasty with the daughter of a police inspector. So I made a date with him."

"Didn't it occur to you what might be said if my daughter was seen with Morty Clock?"

"Of course. But I was careful. We drove to Fairport, where nobody would know either of us, and danced. By the time we returned to town, I hadn't been able to get anything out of him yet, but he was pretty drunk. I thought, given a little more time, I could pry him open. So I went up to his apartment and fed him more drinks. He started to talk. He was maudlin and scared to death. He said he would be hanged if he would let the top man make most of the money while he took the risks and did the work. I pretended to sympathize with him to keep him talking."

"Did he name the top man?"

"No. I tried to get him to, but he only grinned drunkenly and said the police would know, but only when he could make a deal with them to let him off. Then he started to get fresh."

"Forgetting whose daughter you were, eh?"

Lucy let the jibe ride. "I grabbed my coat and got as far as the foyer when he threw his arms about me. There were people in the apartments all about me, but I didn't want to call for help because—well, because I didn't

want to be found in his apartment. Anyway, he was very drunk, and when I gave him a shove he fell away from me. I suppose that's when he tore off my locket, but I was too perturbed to notice. I spun around to pull the door open, but it was already open. A man stood in the hall and he had a gun in his hand."

SHE was breathing hard; she paused for breath.

"His hat was pulled low over his forehead and his coat collar was pulled up and the bright light was in the foyer and the hall light was dim—that's why I didn't see his face. Anyway, I don't think I ever really looked at him, because at once he started to shoot. It was over, it seemed, before I could blink my eyes, and the door had slammed in my face and Morty Clock was lying dead at my feet and somebody in a nearby apartment was yelling. I realized how bad it would look if I were found there, so I pulled the door open and ran out. The hall was empty, but I saw the fire-stairs door opposite the apartment open, so I ran down the hall to the stairs at the other end."

North said: "That was Hi Dawson coming down from the floor above."

"The man who is being held for the murder?"

"The charge isn't murder. Not any longer. Not since the locket was found."

"Oh! Then others know about the locket?"

"They know it exists, but they don't know it's yours—yet."

He replaced the locket in his pocket and dropped into the easychair where he liked to lounge evenings and listen to the radio. He did not look up as he heard her feet move toward him. He felt her hand on his shoulder.

"Pa, you believe me, don't you?"

He took her hand in his and looked up at her. "Lucy, you wouldn't lie to me? This means everything in the world to both of us."

The telephone rang. He said quickly, "I'll take it," and went out to the telephone table in the foyer.

"Harry?" Police Commissioner Reed said. "Say, what's this I hear about you taking evidence in the Clock case out of headquarters before it was registered with the Property Clerk? A locket or something."

"I was checking it against a clue."

"Why didn't you register it first? The D.A. came in here raising hell. I told him to keep his shirt on. I told him I'd back Harry North's integrity to the hilt."

"Thanks," North said dryly.

"Still, you ought to know better than that. You'd tear the head off any of your men who did the same thing." The Commissioner's voice turned suspicious. "What are you doing home? I had a devil of a time locating you."

"I stopped off for some notes I made on the case last night," North said, hating himself because he had to lie.

"That so?" The Commissioner sounded testy now. "Well, never mind checking that clue or whatever you're doing. Come right back with that locket. Bring it to my office."

NORTH hung up and returned to the living room. He stopped in the doorway and leaned wearily against the jamb. Lucy was looking at him expectantly.

"That was the Commissioner," he said. "He wants the locket."

Lucy was like a statue. "Will you have to tell him it's my locket?"

"They'd find out, anyway. I bought it from a local jeweler who knows me. It can easily be traced."

"Will they believe my story?"

North shook his head. "You're the only one who saw the killer. The locket in Clock's hand shows you struggled with him. Dawson saw you run out of the apartment immediately after the shots were fired. There's a good chance that a jury will free you—a smart lawyer can easily prove a self-defense plea—but there will be a terrific stench."

"I see," Lucy said slowly. "They'll say that I'd been carrying on an affair with Morty Clock, and they'll say that because I knew him so well you must have been in the racket with him."

NORTH returned to his easychair and bit the end off a cigar. Lucy sat down on the arm of the chair and put her arm about his broad shoulders.

"Pa, if you don't return the locket, it will just about wreck your career, won't it? I mean, you'll never be able to explain it."

North was surprised at how steady his hand was as he lit the cigar. He said: "I'll say I lost it."

"Pa, they won't believe you. They'll break you, and that will be worse than death for you. It's up to me to pay for being foolish. At the trial I will testify that you had nothing to do with Morty Clock. I'll say that you were against me seeing him, but that I was in love with him and—"

"I'll say I lost the locket," North repeated stolidly.

There was a whisper of sound behind them. North turned his head and saw John Kenny coming through the French doors with a gun in his hand.

"I'll take the locket," Kenny said tightly.

Lucy uttered a choked cry and leaped to her feet. North rose also, ponderously, and stood away from his daughter so that she would be far out of the

line of fire.

"I don't know what you're talking about," North said.

Kenny laughed, not quite sanely. His eyes were bloodshot; his gaunt cheeks were sunken so deep that his face was a skull.

"I followed you," Kenny said. "I was going to beg you again to give me a break." He laughed once more. "Beg you! I got as far as the door and hadn't the courage to come in. Then I heard you talking about the locket, and I stayed there, listening, and heard part of what you said. Now I'm not begging. I'm telling you I want that locket. I'm going over your head and take it to the Commissioner and tell him what I heard here."

Lucy said sharply: "Let him have the locket, Pa."

"No."

Kenny's lips drew back from his teeth. "I need that locket to clear me, and, by God, I'm getting it. I'll give you ten seconds to hand it over."

RAGE possessed North. To him at that moment Kenny was not so much a man with a gun as a subordinate who dared to threaten him. But he acted with cool deliberation. He stepped toward Kenny, saying: "Put up that gun."

Kenny retreated backward to the French doors behind him. "Don't you come near me!"

North came on. "Put up that gun."

Kenny faltered, then raised his gun-arm. Lucy was all eyes, watching the taut drama. She tried to cry out, but could not. North was almost on Kenny now. He reached out a hand to take the gun.

At the last moment he saw in Kenny's half-mad eyes that the man was going to shoot. Used to automatic obedience from his subordinates,

North found it impossible to believe. Yet instinctively he ducked a split-second before Kenny's gun thundered.

The world seemed to fall on North. He felt himself sinking, but he didn't quite go down. He staggered in a gray mist through which Kenny and Lucy were vague, distorted figures standing almost side by side.

As from a distance he heard Lucy scream. Her back was turned toward him, and he saw Kenny swinging away from him, turning his back also.

This is my chance, a part of North's brain that still functioned thought. He gathered his remaining strength to hurl himself on Kenny's back. He took a single stumbling step, and his legs buckled under him. As he dropped, sound exploded in his brain. He was unconscious before he hit the floor.

THERE was a dull, insistent buzzing in North's head. It grew in volume until it filled his entire being. All at once he knew that it was the doorbell ringing. He wondered why Lucy didn't answer.

He opened his eyes and saw a man's shoes inches from his face. There was something wrong about the shoes; the square soles were facing him, as if he were looking up at a man standing on a skylight. Then North realized that he was lying on the floor, and with that he recalled how he had got there.

Fire pierced his skull as he started to rise. He gripped the table and pulled himself upright, swaying a little, and then took a long look at the man on the floor. He lay face-down, his head at the French doors. North didn't have to see the face to recognize that long, gaunt body.

"Lucy," he called feebly.

The bell was still ringing. If Lucy were in the house, she would answer it. Or would she, with *that* on the floor?

He knelt beside Detective John Kenny and felt one of his thin hands. It was like a lump of ice. The other hand, out-flung, still gripped the gun. North lifted Kenny's head and saw the thick patch of blood on the rug and the ugly wound where the bullet had entered. The wound had stopped bleeding some time ago. North looked at his watch and saw that nearly two hours had passed since he had lost consciousness. Kenny must have died at about the same time.

The doorbell stopped ringing. North listened to feet recede on the front walk. He roused himself and went through every room of the bungalow. Lucy wasn't there. He hadn't expected her to be.

It was plain what must have happened. He recalled that the last thing he had seen had been Kenny swinging away from him. Swinging toward Lucy, who must have had a gun available, probably in a handbag on a table; and when she had seen him shoot her father, she had shot Kenny.

North went into the bathroom. In the medicine chest mirror he saw his sharp-featured face green and strained, and the hair on the top of his head was matted with dried blood. His fingers found the shallow groove where the slug from Kenny's gun had creased his skull.

As he was washing the wound, he suddenly thought of something and dipped a wet hand into a pocket. It was empty. He went through all his other pockets. The locket was not on him.

He returned to the living room and stood looking down at the dead detective. He felt suddenly sorry for Kenny, who had paid with his life for a single mistake which had not really been his fault. *I was too hard on him*, North thought.

Where was Lucy? Bitterness suddenly possessed him at the thought that she had run out on him. He could understand that she would lose her head after having killed a man, even though it had been to save her father's life, and flee in panic. Yet she had taken the time to search his wounded and unconscious body for the locket. That showed deliberation. She had left him lying there without trying to bring him to, without being sure whether or not he would recover.

THE doorbell rang again. North closed the French doors and locked them from the inside, and then stood waiting for whoever was ringing to go away. Then he heard the front door squeak open. He hurried across the living room.

Lieutenant Bayer was in the foyer, peering about in the dim light. At the sight of North he blurted out an apology. "Sorry I barged in, sir. I rang a little while ago and there was no answer. I was leaving when I noticed your car in the driveway, so I came back. I found the front door unlocked and thought I'd have a look."

North kept his big body in the living room doorway, blocking out sight of the corpse. He said stiffly: "What did you expect to find?"

Bayer looked uneasy. "The Commissioner is sore. He says he told you a couple of hours ago to come right to his office. I thought it was funny, your car in the driveway and the door unlocked and nobody answering the bell."

For the first time North realized what it meant to be on the other side of the law. The Commissioner had sent Bayer to bring him in by force, if necessary. That much was clear—about all that was clear. How much did the Commissioner know already, or suspect?

"It's all because you took that locket with you," Bayer was saying unhappily. "If you'd only registered it first—"

"Let's go," North said crisply.

He remained in the doorway to the living room as Bayer opened the front door. Bayer looked back, frowning, and waited. Evidently he had orders not to let him out of sight. North moved forward slowly, wondering if Bayer could see past him into the living room. Bayer stepped outside and North followed and locked the door.

AS THEY went up the broad steps of the Municipal Building, North could sense the tension. Word must have got around that something was brewing. The usual crowd of petty politicians who hung around the building looked at him with naked hostility mixed with curiosity. He had got along with the politicians no better than with anybody else, but he was too good a cop for them to be able to interfere with him. Or rather *had been*, he thought with a pang.

The newspapermen were waiting for him in the big lobby. They crowded around him, flinging questions. Bob Roberts of the Blade asked: "Inspector, what's in the report that you and the Commissioner are at an open break over the Morty Clock murder?"

So it had got around that quickly! "Not a thing!" North snapped, boring through them with his big shoulders. Bayer kept at his heels.

North was almost at the elevators when he noticed Denis Shea. Ordinarily Shea would have been at the forefront of the reporters, but now he was standing a little apart from them, leaning against a pillar. Their eyes met, and in Shea's he saw anxiety. Why would Shea be worrying about him?

He wasn't, of course. He was worried about Lucy. But how could Shea know—

The wound in North's scalp started to throb again. He couldn't think clearly about this or about anything else. He had all he could do to keep mentally straight the structure of lies he was about to erect.

Silence greeted him as he and Bayer entered the Commissioner's office. Behind his huge oak desk sat Commissioner Reed, a heavy-set bald man with kindly blue eyes. District Attorney Winthrop, immaculate and dignified, occupied one of the deep leather chairs. Winthrop's slim, youthful assistant, Roy Eagle, stood at a window, his topcoat neatly folded over one arm.

Reed, as always, got straight to the point. "Where's the locket?"

North swayed a little, from the pain in his head and another that was deeper.

"I lost it," he said, and waited for their derisive laughter.

Nobody uttered a sound, which in a way was harder to take.

Reed leaned across his desk. There was nothing kindly about his eyes now. "I've known you a long time, Harry. I've never known you to do a crooked thing or tell a lie. What have you done with the locket?"

"I lost it."

Winthrop said indignantly: "You had no business to take it before it was registered, which means that you took it for a purpose. To lose it, no doubt."

North made no reply. He had expected them to assume that; they would have been pretty dull-witted if they hadn't.

Roy Eagle turned from the window. "I had time to see the initials on the locket. L. N. Your daughter's name is Lucy, isn't it?"

NORTH saw Lieutenant Bayer's eyes widen, but none of the other men in the room had any visible reaction. They must have talked it over in advance.

With an effort, North got his old incisive sarcasm into his tone. "Mr. Winthrop, tell your boy wonder that that's not considered evidence. There are thousands of women with the same initials."

"We're not in a court of law here," Winthrop said smoothly. "It's plain that you deliberately destroyed evidence. As prosecutor—"

The telephone interrupted what no doubt would have been a speech. Commissioners Reed's face darkened as he listened at the handset. He said, "Good work," and slammed down the receiver and stood up. "This ties it, Harry. One of your own men, Bingham, traced the locket. You bought it last February from a jeweler named Schwartzkopf, and you told him you were giving it to your daughter for a birthday present."

So there it was! They would have had trouble tracing the locket from Eagle's and Bayer's vague descriptions; it had been much like most other lockets. But the other way around it had been easy. Eagle had made a guess for whom the initials stood, and all Detective Bingham had had to do was to ask local jewelers if they had ever sold North a locket. Bingham must have been delighted to get dirt on his inspector.

Winthrop was on his feet also. "I want that girl arrested immediately."

Reed handed the D.A. a sour look. "I know my business. . . . Lieutenant Bayer, was Lucy North home when you were there?"

"I can't say, sir. I only got as far as the foyer."

"Try the house first. If she's not

there, send out an alarm for her."

North felt the stabbing pain of his wound pressing down on his brain. Within a few minutes Bayer would find the body, and who would believe the truth? He knew what Winthrop could do to Lucy's story of how her locket had come to be clenched in Morty Clock's dead hand and that she had killed Kenny in defense of her father. The D.A. would have a field day ripping their uncorroborated testimony to shreds. That was why North had sparred for time back in the bungalow by delaying discovery of the body.

Now there was only one thing that could save Lucy.

North said in a clear, steady voice: "Before you go, Bayer, I have a confession to make. You'll find John Kenny's dead body in my living room. I shot him in self-defense."

BAYER turned at the door, gawking. Winthrop gasped, and the triumphant smile was wiped off Eagle's face as if by a sponge.

"What do you mean, self-defense?" Reed said, blinking foolishly.

"Kenny was kill-crazy because I'd suspended him. He followed me home and entered through the French doors which open on the side of my house. He had his gun out and was about to kill me. I fired first. His slug creased my skull and knocked me out for a couple of hours."

"Why didn't you tell Bayer about this shooting?" Reed asked. "Why didn't you tell me when you came in here?"

North ran a hand over his brow as if to clear the fog from his brain. It wasn't altogether acting. "I was scared and groggy. I was just coming to when Bayer rang. You'll find Kenny's gun still in his hand. And here's where I was wounded."

Bayer put in helpfully: "Kenny was

raving mad at Inspector North, sir. He went around muttering that one day somebody would give the Inspector a dose of lead."

Commissioner Reed licked his lips. "My God, what a stink this is going to raise, on top of the bail bond mess and the whispering that some official murdered Morty Clock! An inspector shooting a detective!" He sighed. "Let's have your gun, Harry."

North put his service automatic on the desk, saying: "This isn't the gun with which I shot Kenny."

"Where is it?"

"I threw it away."

"Where?"

"I don't remember. It must have been while I was still unconscious. It happens, you know—a person out on his feet walking around without being able to remember a thing about it later."

ROY EAGLE, near the window, snickered. North himself would have laughed at any criminal who had tried to hand him that one. But he didn't know what kind of gun had shot Kenny, so that was the only safe reply.

District Attorney Winthrop said blandly: "For an experienced police officer, you certainly think of the most inane answers. You lost the locket, just like that; you killed a man, but you don't know what you did with the gun. I anticipate that you will tell me that your daughter's locket and the murder of the detective are not connected."

"My daughter's locket?" North said in apparent surprise. "So you still believe it was hers because of what you think is an identification? As a matter of fact, Lucy lost hers months ago."

Winthrop and Eagle exchanged grim glances. "So that's the way you intend to play it?" Winthrop said. "But it won't work. I'm satisfied that we've connected the locket in Clock's dead

hand with your daughter."

"Who else do you think you'll satisfy?" North said scornfully. "Schwartzkopf didn't say he'd sold that particular locket to me. He said last February he'd sold me a locket something like that. There must be thousands of lockets that look like that, and a lot of them are initialed L.N."

Winthrop glowered, knowing that without physical possession of the locket he had little or no case against Lucy North. A jury would demand definite and concrete proof before convicting of murder a charming and attractive young girl.

"You can't get away with this!" Winthrop shouted, in his rage permitting himself to lose his dignity. "By God, I'll—"

Commissioner Reed waved the D.A. silent. "Let your temper ride for the time being, Winthrop. We don't know what's true and what isn't. I think we'll know soon enough. . . . Lieutenant Bayer, I'll meet you at North's house in a little while. Take plenty of men. . . . Harry, consider yourself under arrest."

AS a concession to his rank, North was detained in a small, unused office. A detective named Johnson, whom North had demoted last year from first-grade, sat with his chair against the wall, paring his nails and looking pleased at the inspector's come-down. North propped his elbows on the dusty desk and rested his aching wounded head on his hands.

What else, he wondered dully, could he have done? Lucy might have been able to beat each murder rap singly. The jury would have doubted that she had not killed Morty Clock, but considering the reputation and the circumstances, she would probably have been freed. There was plenty of evidence to have

proved the shooting of John Kenny justifiable homicide. But take them together—two killings within thirty-six hours—and any plea of moral justification would strike the most sentimental jury as so much eyewash. Winthrop would have no trouble picturing her as a hardened killer.

What would happen to him? Well, that no longer mattered. It had ceased to matter the moment he had walked out of district headquarters with the locket. Broken out of the force to which he had given most of his life, or death in the electric chair—it was merely a choice between two different kinds of death, and the living death would be harder.

A tray of food was brought in to him, but he touched only the coffee. Then he smoked cigars and prowled the cramped confines of the office, while Johnson followed him with mocking eyes.

Where was Lucy? He was trying not to think of how she had run out on him while he had lain unconscious. Now, suddenly, he feared that when she heard of his arrest, she would give herself up, insisting on her father's innocence and her own guilt. He wouldn't let her. He had told many lies already; he could think of more. He would say that she was trying to sacrifice herself for him, and the sob sisters would play her up as a devoted daughter. Nobody would believe her except Winthrop and Eagle and Reed, and the fact remained that without the locket they had no case.

An eternity ticked off in that office. From a window he watched night come. Another tray arrived, and this time he ate. Still no word came for him. What were they waiting for?

IT WAS close to nine o'clock when the Commissioner sent for him.

Commissioner Reed was alone in his

office. He sat back in his chair and looked at North for a long time. Unwaveringly, North met his gaze.

"We found Kenny's gun in his hand," Reed said at last. "One shot was fired. We dug a slug that fitted his gun out of the wall. There was a trace of blood on the rug where you had fallen. That much checked with what you told me. The slug shows Kenny was standing with his back to the French doors when he shot you. But his body was lying facing the opposite direction, face-down. He died instantly, so he didn't stagger around. He fell toward whoever shot him as soon as he was hit."

North was prepared for that. "I didn't pass out at once after Kenny nicked me. I must have stumbled to the door and Kenny turned to follow me."

"He had plenty of time to finish you off while you were parading around."

"I guess so. But for some reason he didn't."

Reed seemed to lose interest in that track. He asked: "Harry, you didn't kill Morty Clock?"

"No."

"Of course you didn't. You were in your office the night Clock was murdered. You came back at eight, and there were plenty of witnesses who saw you there constantly until Hi Dawson was brought in and you questioned him yourself."

North was suddenly wary, knowing that Reed was about to spring a trap.

Reed wiggled a pencil at him. "You didn't kill Kenny. Because Kenny was shot with the same gun that murdered Morty Clock."

North recoiled as if from a physical blow. If what Reed said was true, it meant that whoever had shot John Kenny had also shot Morty Clock. And Lucy had shot Kenny.

Reed kept his eyes on North. "Maybe

I'd do the same if it were my daughter," he said gently.

"You're not implying that Lucy did it?" North tried a final bluff. "She wasn't there. She left the house early this morning."

"It's no good, Harry," Reed said. "At about a quarter to eleven Lucy phoned your grocer an order. We've been checking carefully. I called you at eleven, when you promised to be right back with the locket. I imagine it was right after that that Kenny came in. That puts Lucy in the house just before Kenny's arrival and probably after. We know the locket in Clock's dead hand was hers and that she was the girl Dawson saw running out of the apartment. She still had the gun with which she had killed Clock; and when she saw Kenny shoot you, she used that gun a second time."

"You're guessing," North muttered.

"Circumstantial evidence. Winthrop doesn't even have to depend on that. She'll talk plenty when she learns how much we have on her. Hi Dawson, of course, is completely out of it now because he was in jail when Kenny was killed."

NORTH'S big body slumped into itself. He should have known from the first that it was no good. Often in the past he himself had trapped a criminal because an edifice constructed of lies sooner or later collapsed under the impact of a single truth.

North said tightly: "All right, I made a lot of it up. But whatever Lucy told you is the truth. She didn't kill Clock, and she shot Kenny in order to save my life. For God's sake, don't let a wrecking squad torture her into a phoney confession."

"What the devil are you talking about?" Reed said, looking at him quizzically. "We haven't any statement

from Lucy for the simple reason that we haven't picked her up yet."

North's jaw sagged. "Didn't she get in touch with the police?"

"Not a word out of her or a sign of her, though half the force has been hunting for her for the last eight hours."

"Does she know I'm under arrest?"

"If she's seen a paper or listened to a radio. That's another thing that puzzles me about this cockeyed business. I know Lucy. You mightn't be a man with many friends, Harry, but Lucy thinks the world of you. Frankly I'm surprised that she hasn't given herself up when she heard you were arrested for a murder she committed."

North said nothing, feeling the hurt of Reed's words more than everything that had been said or done. Yet he had an acute sense that something was wrong, that a completely false line ran through the pattern of events. He had sensed that from the first, but it had remained far in the back of his aching mind.

"I don't know if this is another act you're putting on, Harry," Reed said. "I had an idea you had hidden her out. It still seems that way. You mean to say she didn't tell you where she was going after she'd shot Kenny?"

"I didn't see her. When I recovered consciousness, she was gone."

"Gone, eh?" Reed sounded skeptical. "Just went out, with her father lying there, dying, for all she knew?"

"I know it doesn't make sense. Not with a girl like Lucy. Only a little while before she'd begged me to bring in the locket, that she was willing to face a trial and scandal so I wouldn't be touched. She's always been devoted. She—" North's head jerked up and flame leaped into his eyes. "Listen! I should have known better. Lucy didn't lie to me about Clock and she didn't run out on me. She didn't shoot Clock

and she didn't shoot Kenny."

"Well, well, that simplifies everything," Reed sneered.

"I thought she'd shot Kenny because it seemed to me that she was the only one who could have," North went on eagerly. "I was in a fog after Kenny's bullet hit me. I saw Kenny turn, and later, when I awoke, I had an idea that he had been turning toward her. But he wasn't. Lucy was standing at his side, though several feet from him. I remember seeing Kenny's back after he'd turned, and I saw Lucy's back also. They were both facing the French doors. The doors were open; that's how Kenny had come in. He had been out there awhile, listening to Lucy and me talking. Why couldn't the murderer have come a little later, following Kenny perhaps or wanting to find out what I'd do with the locket? He saw his chance to kill Kenny."

"Why would he want to kill Kenny?"

"Perhaps Kenny had found out more about the murder than he had revealed. Perhaps to prevent Kenny from taking the locket. That's it—the locket. For some reason it was important to the killer, because he took the time to remove it from my pocket."

"And Lucy?"

"She saw him murder Kenny. He forced her to go with him. She may be"—North's voice caught—"dead."

Reed sighed. "You're a genius for doping out a story for every set of circumstances."

"But wouldn't I have told you this at once? It would have cleared Lucy and myself right away without my sticking my neck out."

"What about Lucy's locket in Clock's hand? Do you still deny it was hers?"

NORTH hesitated. Lies hadn't got him anywhere; they had only tightened the case against Lucy. So

now he repeated to Reed what Lucy had told him about her experience with Morty Clock.

"I'll work the way I never worked in my life to find the murderer," North concluded. "I'll put every man in my department on twenty-four hour detail. I'll turn the city inside-out."

"It will be done," Reed said quietly, "but you won't be the one to do it. You're under suspension."

"You can't do that! Not now!" North jabbed his knuckles down on Reed's desk. "I've got to find Lucy and the murderer!"

"I'm pretty easy on you, Harry," Reed said. "Winthrop will raise hell because I don't throw you in jail as an accessory. Sure you say Lucy didn't kill Kenny and that you didn't help her escape, but why should I believe you? The only reason I'm easy on you is that you've a fine record behind you; and besides, you can't altogether blame a man for battling for his daughter."

"Easy!" North's voice was bitter. "Easy by tying me hand and foot. I'm the only man with the experience to break this case. You've got to give me a chance."

Reed shook his head. "Sorry. I'm overlooking a lot, but I can't overlook everything."

"Don't all my years of service mean anything? Don't—"

North broke off. Time reversed itself twelve hours, and he saw himself back in his own office where a detective was pleading with his superior for another chance. Except that on that occasion North had been seated behind the desk and it had been poor John Kenny standing on the other side, with his knuckles boring into the desk just like this.

A feeling of shame and humility swept over him. North dropped his

hands from Reed's desk and without another word went out of the office.

AT THAT hour the lobby downstairs was deserted. His footsteps echoed hollowly on the stone floor, and it was as if they belonged to a ghost of his former self following him. Outside, at the head of the broad stone steps, he paused and looked around. He had no idea whom he expected to find, and there was nobody. Not one of the many men from his district, with whom he had worked closely for so many years, was here to offer help or sympathy or loyalty. Since his wife had died more years ago than he liked to remember, he had sought neither praise nor warmth nor companionship, except from Lucy. His work and Lucy had been his life. Now he had neither.

The sense of being utterly alone in an indifferent world was an unbearable weight over his heart.

He had walked only a few blocks when he became aware that he was being tailed. He had no chance to get a good look at the man's face, but it was obvious why the shadow had been clamped on him. Commissioner Reed, of course, was playing every angle. He was far from convinced that North didn't know where his daughter was, and so he had let him go primarily in the hope that North might be followed to her hideout.

The tail wasn't hard to shake. North entered a huge apartment house, made rapid transfers from one automatic elevator to another, then took the stairs down to the basement out a side door. A taxi was conveniently nearby. North settled back and lit a cigar.

FROM a cigar store across the street from the Morning Blade building, North phoned the Blade newsroom. Denis Shea, he was told, wasn't in. But

he managed to get Bob Roberts.

Two minutes later Roberts came out of the building and headed up the street. North detached himself from a store doorway and fell in step with him.

"It's a mess," Roberts said. "Denis is going crazy. He says it's a frame-up against Lucy. I'm afraid, though, the evidence against her is pretty strong."

"Never mind that now," North said impatiently. "Do you know if Shea has any idea who the top man of the bail bond racket is?"

"I don't think so, though you can't tell about Denis. He keeps his dope under his hat till it's in type."

"Has he mentioned to you any of the small-fry in the department who might have been working with Clock?"

Roberts reflected. "I told you he doesn't give anything away, not even to me who's on the same paper. But the other day he did say something about a precinct lieutenant named—let's see, Wilson or Willer or something like that."

"Al Willet of the Ninth?"

"That's the guy," Roberts said. "A fat, slimy creature who looks as if he'd pick pennies off a dead man's eyes. Denis was wondering how Willet, on a lieutenant's salary, could afford to buy his wife a two thousand dollar mink coat and an expensive new car and pay to have a house built to his own specifications. Denis said that wasn't enough evidence to print, especially as he expects to dig up better stuff on Willet, but there's no doubt Willet—"

North wasn't listening any longer. He said, "Thanks," and flagged a passing taxi.

LIEUTENANT WILLET'S new home was a sumptuous affair of glass brick wings and flowered terraces

and flagstone walks—a lot better than North could afford on an inspector's pay. North had to walk a good hundred feet from the street to reach the front door.

Willet himself answered the bell. His squat, fleshy body was attired in a silk dressing gown. The myriad creases of his face jerked at the sight of North.

North's hand was in his right coat pocket, holding a cigar which was poked against the material. "This is a gun, Willet," he said softly. "You know how I feel. I'd shoot down ten like you in order to save my daughter and clear myself."

Willet's jowls quivered. He must have been a bundle of nerves since Clock's death, fearful of how close the investigation of the murder would come to him. Now he was scared sick.

"What's that got to do with me?" he said hoarsely.

"You've been getting a rake-off from Morty Clock."

"I swear it's not true."

From the house a woman called "Who is it, Al?"

Willet glanced over his shoulder, and North stiffened. Past Willet he saw a hallway, and from a door on the right light streamed and radio music drifted. The woman, probably his wife, was in there.

Willet turned his head back to what he did not doubt was a gun in North's pocket. He wet his lips. "Police business, Martha," he said loudly. "I'll be right in." Then he dropped his voice. "You can't prove a thing against me."

"My gun is convinced that you are a crook and a rat," North said. "I want the name of the top man in the racket."

"What racket?"

North's eyes were points of hot ice. "Damn you! Are you trying to make me kill you?"

Willet shivered. He looked desperately toward the street as if for help from that direction. "I swear I hadn't a thing to do with Clock being murdered. I didn't know about it till I heard he was dead."

"Quit stalling. All I want is a name."

"What will happen to me if I tell you? Will you promise—"

The flicking of Willet's eyes toward the shrubs at the side of the door warned North. He started to spin, but it was too late. Out of the night a dark form hurled itself on his back.

THE suddenness of the attack pulled

North backward off his feet. His left shoulder crashed on the flagstone terrace, and his assailant threw himself on top of him. North's left arm was pinned under him and the other's weight wouldn't let him get his right hand out of his coat pocket. He thrashed frantically. Lying on his side, he could glimpse only the side of his assailant's face, and there wasn't enough light for that little to mean anything.

Willet shrilled: "My God, not here in front of my house!"

Above him North saw a knife. He threw his head sideways, smacking it on the stone, and the blade whistled by and struck sparks from the flagstone. The knife came up again, twisting sideways so that the blade was under his throat. This time the assassin would not miss.

A gun barked sharply in the night. The weight slid off North's body. The gun spoke a second time. North twisted himself up to his knees in time to see the dark back plunge in among the shrubbery. From the street a man was running, cutting across the lawn at an angle. He paused once to fire a shot into the darkness, then disappeared from view.

North rose groggily to his feet. Nausea rooted him where he was. The smack against the flagstone had opened his scalp wound and his head was on fire. He stood swaying, fighting for strength. He remembered Willet and turned to see that he had vanished also. The front door was shut. From inside the house came no sound but the soft radio music.

A tall, loose-jointed figure stepped out of the shrubbery. A gun dangled from his fingers.

"Are you hurt?" Denis Shea asked.

North shook his head. "Just groggy. Thanks, Shea."

"I had to shoot high the first time for fear of hitting you." Shea's voice, still carrying a hint of languor, sounded apologetic. "Then I lost him in the darkness. Who was he?"

"I had no chance to see his face. It happened too quickly and it was dark." North pressed his handkerchief to his bleeding scalp. "How come you're here?"

"I returned to the office right after Bob Roberts spoke to you. He told me he'd told you about Willet and then you'd rushed away, so I figured you were up to something. I was sure it had to do with Lucy."

NORTH looked at the young reporter and realized that, after all, he was not utterly alone. He had disapproved of Shea's attentions to Lucy, but now it was a bond between them, stronger even than the fact that Shea had just saved his life.

He said gently: "You care a lot for Lucy?"

"Yes."

North became aware of the people gathering on the sidewalk a hundred feet away. They must have heard the shots, but they were afraid to come nearer. A burly uniformed cop should-

dered through the crowd and hurried toward the house with his gun out.

Lieutenant Willet must have been watching for reinforcements from the window, for now he opened the door and stepped out. He had his service revolver in a tight grip. Mrs. Willet, a buxom bleached blonde in a flowered housecoat, clung to his left arm.

The harness bull looked at Shea's gun and then at Willet's. "What goes on, Lieutenant?"

Willet pointed to North with his gun. "That man tried to murder me."

"He did, eh?" The cop swung toward North, putting special savagery into the gesture for the benefit of the lieutenant. Then he checked himself as for the first time he got a direct look at North's face. "Inspector North! Jeez!"

North said in the cool voice of authority he used with his men: "I came here to have a talk with Willet and he had a stooge who tried to knife me lying in wait in the shrubs."

"That's right, officer," Shea drawled. "I showed up in time to take a pot shot at the would-be killer. Unfortunately I missed."

"They're both lying!" Willet yelled. "They rang the bell and when I came to the door they tried to shoot me. Arrest them both. And don't be afraid of North. He has no authority. He has been suspended."

Hopelessly the cop looked from one to the other. "I guess this is big enough for the Commissioner himself," he decided. "I guess we'd all better get in the house."

They sat in the living room, Willet and his wife side by side on the couch, Shea standing indolently against the fireplace and North sunk deep in a chair. Radio cops were pouring in, and they seemed as bewildered and uncertain as the harness bull. They

stood about whispering in awed excitement. It wasn't every day that a cop came across a shooting fracas between an inspector and a lieutenant.

North buried his aching head in his hands. This had been his last chance and he had failed. He would not again be able to force Willet to reveal information.

He asked Shea: "You don't know who the top man in the racket is, do you?"

"If I knew," Shea said grimly, opening and closing his hands, "I'd be where he is, and he wouldn't like it."

So that was that. There was nowhere else to turn.

COMMISSIONER Reed, District Attorney Winthrop and Roy Eagle came in together. Reed was furious. He strode over to where North sat.

"What kind of a mess have you started now?"

North lifted his head wearily. "Lieutenant Willet is part of the bail bond racket. I tried to bluff him into telling me who the top man is. The top man was right here, behind the shrubs outside. He jumped on my back and tried to knife me. I didn't see his face."

"Bluff!" Willet burst out. "North had a gun in his pocket. He said he'd shoot me with it."

"You mean this gun?" North said.

He pulled the crushed cigar out of his pocket. One of the cops laughed, but he cut it short when nobody else joined in.

"He had a gun," Willet insisted. "He must have thrown it away. Then Shea, who was behind him, started throwing bullets at me. I ducked into the house and got my gun. Ask my wife."

"That's just what happened," Mrs. Willet agreed firmly. "I saw the whole

thing from the window."

"And who was the lad who tried to knife Inspector North?" Shea asked lazily.

"There was no other man. You made it up. There were just you two."

Mrs. Willet agreed that every word her husband uttered was the absolute truth.

North rose angrily from his chair, but when he was on his feet he decided that these cross-accusations of lying would get nowhere. What difference did it make now? He had no way of getting to Lucy. If she were not dead already, her captor would kill her soon to get her off his hands. North leaned against the table, more tired than he had ever thought a man could be.

Winthrop did not appear displeased by the turn of events. He said: "What makes you think, North, that Lieutenant Willet is part of the bail bond racket? We investigated his precinct as well as others and could find nothing wrong."

"I told him," Shea said.

"You have proof?" Reed asked.

"Not enough to print in the paper, but enough for the department to be interested. Where did Willet get all his money suddenly?"

Willet's fat face collapsed. "It's my wife's," he muttered. "She inherited it."

"We can check that easily enough," Reed said. Willet almost crumpled at that, but Reed turned away from him. "Shea, are you sure you saw somebody try to kill North?"

"Of course I'm sure. Didn't I take a couple of shots at him and chase him? You don't believe I'd calmly try to murder Willet before he refused to talk?"

Roy Eagles snickered. "Shea's in love with North's daughter. Naturally

they'll back each other up. If you ask me, they've all got something to hide, including Willet."

REED scratched his palm with the fingernails of the other hand. He wasn't liking this at all. The thought of the scandal that would break in the department by tomorrow made him sick.

He said dourly: "Why did you shake the tail I put on you, Harry?"

"I don't like being followed."

"That's proof that he was up to no good," Winthrop asserted; "and he as much as admits that he threatened Lieutenant Willet with a weapon. Whether or not it was a real weapon is beside the point. Are you going to lock him up, Commissioner, or are you going to pass the buck?"

Reed jabbed an angry finger at the D.A. "I'll run my men and my department without any advice from you. I'm not going to crucify North until I'm sure of the facts. I'm jailing him only to keep him out of further trouble—a mild charge like disorderly conduct."

Shea moved his long limbs. "You can't do that to him. He'll carry the stigma on his record."

"His record!" Winthrop snorted. "It's mud already."

The argument went on, Shea against Winthrop, with Reed somewhere in between; but North paid little attention to it. He looked out of a window into the night, feeling the weariness possess his bones. Whether they put him in jail or let him go free for a little while wouldn't make much difference now.

The three-cornered verbal battle went on. Shea was flinging threats at them. Through the wide public that eagerly devoured every word he wrote in the Blade, Shea could exert plenty of power. And because of Lucy he

was now trying to use that power on North's side.

Lucy! North thought. I'm quitting on her. I'm lying down in my fight for her because the odds seem hopeless. What a hell of a father!

The thought was like a shot in the arm, reviving the will to strike back. But if he were jailed now, he would be out of it until it was too late.

He glanced at the three who were arguing, with the cops and Eagle and Willet and Mrs. Willet listening in. Shea wasn't getting anywhere, and any moment now Reed would have to order one of the cops to take North in. A few feet from North there was an open door, and nobody happened to be looking in his direction.

He slid through the door and saw the shadowy outlines of dining room furniture by the light flowing in from the other room. He looked once more over his shoulder into the living room, and he stiffened. Commissioner Reed's eyes were on him, and North knew that he was still visible in spite of the darkness around him. Yet, astoundingly, Reed said nothing. Instead a smile flickered at the corners of his mouth, and he turned back to Shea and Winthrop.

North understood. The Commissioner didn't dare to simply let him go. There was too much pressure on him and there would be a lot more. By letting him escape now he was giving North this last chance to try to clear himself. A lot more of a chance, North reflected as he melted back in the dining room, than he himself had given poor John Kenny.

North dropped through an open window and trotted along a high hedge that fringed Willet's grounds.

hid North from the street and from direct view of the men at the counter. He was fairly certain that there would be little or no heat on him—Reed would see to that, until tomorrow, at least—but it paid to be careful. After walking the streets, he had come here because he had to sit somewhere and because he hoped that coffee would clear his head. He was on his fourth cup.

His brain wouldn't function. The throbbing under his skull got in the way of connected thought, and the shop talk of the two hack drivers at the counter and the syrupy voice emitting from the radio on the refrigerator behind the counter formed an undertone of chaos in his mind.

Suddenly, out of the jumble of words, two names separated themselves. *Lieutenant Willet and Inspector North!* The names came from the radio.

The hack drivers became quiet, listening, and the counterman turned his head from the skillet to listen also. North froze, his hands gripping the edge of the table.

Lieutenant Willet was dead. He had been shot a short while ago, and Inspector Harry North had murdered him. That was what the radio voice was saying.

Inspector Harry North, whose daughter Lucy was being sought by the police for the murders of Morty Clock and Detective John Kenny, had been suspected of possible complicity in the crimes. Nevertheless, this evening North had been released for lack of concrete evidence, although the Commissioner had suspended him from the force. Some time after his release, North had visited Lieutenant Willet and had attempted to shoot him. While being questioned by Police Commissioner Reed and District Attorney Winthrop in Willet's house, North had

IN THE lunchroom, the jutting telephone booth at the side of the table

made his escape. Less than an hour later, after the police had departed from Willet's house, Mrs. Willet, who was preparing for bed, heard a shot below. She ran downstairs and found her husband dead on the living room floor.

"Boy, with them coppers killing each other off, there'll soon be none left in the city," one of the hackies commented. "That makes the second one today."

The radio voice was still talking. According to District Attorney Winthrop, the motive was obvious. Inspector North and Lieutenant Willet had both been working hand in glove with Morty Clock. North's daughter had shot Clock and then Kenny, and North, who was finding himself cornered, had shot Willet to keep him from talking.

North thought dully: *He's clever, that killer. He's becoming desperate and using his gun too much, but he's keeping his head. Willet's source of income would surely have been investigated, and the killer feared that Willet would crack wide open. So with a single bullet, he eliminated Willet and made me a murder fugitive. All the attention will be paid to me.*

THE radio mentioned Commissioner Reed, and North listened breathlessly. Reed, who believed that North had betrayed his trust in him, had refused to make a statement, except that every attempt would be made to apprehend Inspector North. The Commissioner, the radio voice said, had appeared stunned by the news.

"Well, ain't that something?" the counterman said, flipping a hamburger. "And those are the guys we pay good money to preserve law and order."

"It's a laugh," the first hackie said.

"This North—I heard about him from some of the cops," the second hackie said, "fell on them like a ton of

bricks if they stepped an inch off the straight and narrow. And he was the worst one all the time."

Keeping his back to the counter, North rose. His hand shook as he fumbled a quarter out of his pocket and dropped it on the table. He wasn't sure that his legs would carry him to the door. He felt a tired old man.

The dark, silent streets were alive with menace. Distantly he saw a uniform. He stepped into a doorway and crouched there. Numberless times in the past he had set out dragnets for criminals; now he was learning how it felt to be on the other side. He understood now, as he had never been able to, why, in the end, many fugitives voluntarily gave themselves up, unable to stand the ceaseless suspense and the maddening fear. That was his lot now.

The heavy footsteps receded. North left the doorway, hugging buildings and diving for cover whenever a figure neared him or a car approached.

Dim light showed through a single window of North's bungalow. North looked in. A detective named Jones, attached to Lieutenant Bayer's Homicide Squad, was in North's cozy little study. He was occupying North's leather chair at the desk and was studying a racing form.

North had expected to find at least one man on guard in his home. It was a matter of luck that Detective Jones was taking it easy and had selected the comfortable study, which was on the opposite side of the house from the living room.

North cut around the rear of the bungalow to the driveway. His car was still parked where he had left it that morning; Homicide hadn't bothered to pull it into the garage. They hadn't been concerned with the car or anything outside the house, because to their minds it was a simple case of

Lucy having shot Kenny and then leaving, confining tangible evidence to the living room.

Well, probably they were right, but he was back here now because there was nowhere else to turn. He got a flashlight out of the glove compartment of his car and, keeping it doused, went to the French doors leading into the living room, through which Kenny and later the killer had come.

THERE was no walk between the driveway and the French doors. It was solid lawn. Or, rather, it had been lawn before a fungus growth had killed most of the grass. Between the hair-like yellow patches of dying grass, there were ragged splotches of bare soil.

There was a patch like that at the street side of the French doors, close against the wall. North got down on hands and knees and held the flashlight low to the ground so that the beam would not be seen from street or house. Last night there had been a slight rain, and these patches were natural traps for rain water. Footprints were plain—two distinct pairs, one set slightly overlapping the other. They were rather deep, with heels and toes more or less evenly depressed—the footprints of men who had stood motionless for some time, their weight solid on their feet as they listened to the conversation in the house. Kenny first, and then the murderer.

North risked throwing the beam over the entire lawn. The largest of the bare spots, toward the gravel driveway and near the hedges that blocked out the street, attracted him. All the footprints here seemed to have been made by the same shoes. A man's shoes, though rather small for a man.

North was no tracker, but among the subjects he lectured on at the Police Academy was the Investigation and

Identification of Footprints. He had neither the time nor equipment for the complex formulas modern police science had evolved to read and distinguish footprints, but the *direction lines* and *walking pictures* told their stories.

The prints leading toward the house were depressed at the toes and somewhat slurred, with the heels hardly visible. But on the way to the driveway, the heels had sunk deep, with the most pressure on the outer portion of the soles, and the steps were very short.

Whoever made the tracks had run to the house in a great hurry, and then had returned slowly to the driveway, putting each foot down carefully and heavily, taking short steps and resting the bulk of his weight back on his heels for balance. Because he had been carrying a heavy burden. A rather small man, as the small shoes indicated, carrying the inert weight of Lucy's one hundred and twenty pounds.

The picture broadened. North had also moved to and from the driveway—this morning when he had arrived with the locket and a short while ago when he had gone to his car to fetch the flashlight—but he had left no prints here. The walking line of the footprints pointed to a spot about ten feet behind the rear of North's car.

The killer hadn't pulled his car into the driveway when he had arrived. North, in the bungalow, would have heard it, and Kenny, standing outside, would have seen it. He had parked a distance away because he had not dared run the risk of having it noticed near North's house. After he had murdered Kenny, he had had to take the chance of pulling his car into the driveway, behind North's, so that the hedges could block him from the street as he removed Lucy. He had been in a hurry to get back, running, having knocked her out and afraid that she might re-

cover before he returned. Or possibly he had killed her also and had then rushed back with his car to remove her body so that the police would leap to the assumption that she had fled because of guilt.

UNSTEADILY North rose to his feet. He had learned something—a great deal perhaps—but what good did it do? He was not in a position to make casts of the footprints and use them for the purpose of identification. Even if he could, without supplementary evidence, the prints would show merely that the man had moved to and from the driveway. And many men had had official reason to have been here this afternoon during the investigation of Kenny's murder.

A sound brought him back to his immediate danger. He looked over his shoulder to see one of the French doors opening slowly and softly. The light had not been put on in the living room. In the darkness North moved back against the house and flattened himself at the side of the opening door.

The shadow of a man appeared. For long seconds the shadow stood perfectly still, and North could hear him breathe. Then a finger of light stabbed out toward the driveway.

Detective Jones moved forward cautiously, gun in his right hand, flashlight in his left. North took two quick steps and swung his fist from the ground. His knuckles cracked against Jones' temple. Jones spun sideways, and North's other fist swished up under the detective's jaw. Without a sound Jones crumpled and lay still.

It had been years since North had hit a man, and he grunted with satisfaction at the discovery that his big fists had lost little of their power. Too bad it had to be Jones, who was here simply in the line of duty, but there

had been no help for it. He doused Jones' flashlight and plucked the .38 automatic out of Jones' limp fingers and emptied his pockets of spare cartridges. Then he dragged Jones into the house and tied and gagged him.

He drove off in his own car, taking a big chance, but he was banking on the fact that Jones would not be discovered for some time and report that North could be found in his car. Two or three hours was the most he could hope for. It wasn't much, but it was something. The mental and physical weariness had miraculously left him. Lucy might be dead and the road ahead was still difficult and dangerous, but he was fighting back now.

ALTHOUGH it was close to midnight, the Municipal Building had not yet gone to bed. All the lights on the floor containing the District Attorney's offices were on, and so were those in the Commissioner's office and in the ground wing housing the Mayor's office. The case had started off sensationally enough forty-eight hours ago with the murder of Morty Clock, but developments since then had set the entire City Administration on its ears.

North sat in his parked car with all lights out. An hour had passed since his arrival, and his nerves were knotted with tension. Every time somebody who knew him left the building and moved in his direction, his heart ceased functioning. His face was no more than a dark blob in the interior of the car, but the car itself might be recognized.

Suddenly his body jerked upright. Two men came down the broad steps together—Denis Shea, tall and loose-jointed, and Roy Eagle, slim and boyish. They crossed the street to a flashy two-toned convertible parked at the curb. It was Shea's car.

North kicked his starter, and as the convertible started rolling, North followed half a block behind.

It was easy enough at first. The conspicuous design of Shea's car allowed North to fall back a safe distance and still keep it in sight. At a rather leisurely rate they moved through the main thoroughfare. They left the city behind and purred over a highway. The convertible gathered speed, but North moved up closer to its tail-light. Behind him other cars were strung out, all moving in the same direction; Shea or Eagle would have no reason to suspect that the nearest was following them.

Only two miles had clicked by when the convertible swung off the highway. As North turned also, he saw an unlighted, rut-gashed dirt road. His light might give him away here. He cut off his lights and clucked his tongue with satisfaction. The three-quarters moon which sailed high in the sky showed the bare outlines of the road.

THE tiny red spark of the distant tail-light was a beacon drawing him on. The road was as bad as it could be. As he bounced and skidded in the semi-darkness, he tried not to think of the consequences of failure or the fact that he might have, somewhere, made a mistake. This would be his last chance, ever—for himself and for Lucy, if she still lived.

Over a hump in the road the tail-light and the dull splash of headlights vanished. And when he topped the rise, the road ahead remained dark. North slowed down, peering, but all he could see were the dark curtains of trees on either side of the road. Somewhere just ahead they must have turned off.

Suddenly he stopped the car. Two or three hundred feet ahead he could

see the dark shape of an automobile at the side of the road. He thought he saw movement outside the car, but he could not be certain. His own car could now be seen from the convertible, and moving without lights in the night, it would look suspicious and menacing. But still there was no sound or sign of life ahead.

A trap? It was possible.

Gun in hand, North slipped out of his car and walked cautiously forward, hugging the side of the road. A motor sounded behind him, approaching. He swung around. Headlights glowed over the rise in the road, then burst fully on him. He glanced at the trees on his right, but he had been seen. Any odd movement on his part would arouse curiosity in the oncoming car.

He dropped his gun into his pocket, thinking: *Nothing to be nervous about. Just another passing car.*

The headlight impaled him; the car jerked to a stop. Lieutenant Floyd Bayer leaped out.

He did not seem surprised at finding North there. Briskly he stepped toward him, his gun firm in his hand.

"Sorry about this, sir," he said, almost apologetically. "I recognized your car in the city, going the opposite way, and I turned around and followed you. I had an idea you were headed for your daughter's hideout."

"I hoped I was," North replied dryly. Nothing stirred around Shea's convertible.

"Where is she?" Bayer said. "I hate to do this, but it's my duty."

"That's what I was trying to find out. That's Shea's car over there. I was following it while you were following me. Roy Eagle is with him."

Bayer's head turned sharply and then back. "You think Shea—"

"I think we ought to find out where they went."

BAYER leaned forward and patted North's side and lifted the automatic North had taken from Detective Jones. "You used to lecture me never to trust anybody," Bayer said with a wry grin.

"Quite right, Lieutenant. Let's go."

The convertible was empty. Bayer pulled out a flashlight and threw the beam around, as if he expected to find a body.

North pointed to a narrow footpath which led into the woods. "This is the only way they could have gone."

"Maybe you're right," Bayer's voice and manner continued suspicious. "You go first."

The woods closed in on North. The branches overhead were too thick to allow moonlight to penetrate, but Bayer's flashlight poured light from behind.

Then, out of the stillness of the night, a voice knifed, whispering harshly: "By God, you'll talk or you'll get it again!"

A second voice groaned.

North was running now, with Bayer close at his heels. The darkness ahead was sliced by a pencil of light that shone into North's eyes. North blinked, momentarily blinded.

"Who's there?" a voice demanded.

Bayer had stepped beside North. "The police. You're covered."

The voice chuckled, and North recognized it as belonging to Roy Eagle. "Well, well, Lieutenant Bayer! And Inspector North, of all people! I hoped this would be a private party but you can join in."

Eagle's flashlight dipped and North could see the little clearing and the two men who occupied it. Denis Shea was lying on the ground. He propped himself up on one elbow and shook his head groggily. A thick jagged line of blood ran from his temple to the corner of his mouth.

Roy Eagle, the bright young assistant District Attorney, stood over him, a small compact revolver in one hand, a flashlight in the other.

"What's going on here?" Bayer demanded.

"I have your murderer for you, Lieutenant," Eagle said. He made a mock bow toward North. "Deepest apologies, Inspector, for having pretended to suspect you. I was rather sure from the first that it was Denis Shea."

SHEA spat blood from his mouth and said thickly: "He's trying to turn it the other way around because you two stepped in on the scene. He's the killer."

Eagle smiled. "We come across that often, don't we, gentlemen? A ruthless killer trying to pin the blame on somebody else. Here are the facts. You know that I was detailed by the D.A. to investigate the bail bond racket. I couldn't get concrete facts, but certain things pointed in a certain direction. Shea seemed to have enough dope to print articles on the racket, but not enough to print names. It didn't seem sensible. Shea wouldn't be the first reporter to use his knowledge to extort money from crooks. When Morty Clock refused to pay any more tribute to him, Shea tried to scare him by putting his name in the articles. He scared Clock all right, but to the point where Clock was ready to talk out loud, so Shea had to kill him."

"Ah," Bayer said.

"Shea knew that I suspected him," Eagle went on. "Tonight he was waiting for me when I left the office. He said he had a lot on his mind about the case and suggested that we take a ride and talk it over. I had a pretty good idea that he would take me to an isolated place and try to kill me. So when he stopped the car here I was

ready for him and had a gun in his ribs."

Shea wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "That's pretty accurate if you reverse it. When Eagle conducted the investigation, he got plenty of dirt, but he didn't report it. Instead he blackmailed Clock and the guilty cops and so worked his way to the top of the racket."

"You have proof?" North asked.

"No," Shea admitted. "I wasn't even sure, but I was desperate about Lucy and tried this chance. While we were driving, I dropped subtle hints that I suspected him, figuring that, if he was the killer, he might lead me to where he had Lucy and kill me there where he could easily dispose of my body. He didn't dare risk any open murders and leaving more corpses around; every additional killing might leave a vital clue. Unfortunately he got the drop on me and forced me out of the car here."

Bayer looked from one to the other in bewilderment. He said: "Why were you gun-whipping him?"

"I admit it isn't exactly lawful, but what else could I do?" Eagle explained. "The police use the same methods. If I could get him to tell me where Lucy is—or her body—I'd have the case broken and get the credit for it." He grinned. "Frankly, I'd like to be D.A. some day, and another feather in my cap wouldn't hurt."

North looked down at Shea. "What have you to say to that?"

"He tried to make me tell him if anybody else had the idea he was the murderer," Shea said. "After I told him, he meant to rub me out."

Eagle laughed sharply. "I've heard many a killer whine—"

"To hell with all this," Bayer broke in. "I'm taking all three of you in and let the Commissioner make some sense out of it."

"No," North said quietly.

THEY all looked at him. Once again North was the hawk-faced inspector with the cold-fire eyes. "We can settle it right now. The killer is here and his nerves are raising hell with him. At this moment he's fighting with every ounce of strength against panic. Too much killing in too short a time. He thought he needed to murder only once, Morty Clock, but he's had to go on killing, taking a more desperate risk every time, until now he doesn't dare go back to police headquarters. Because now the whole bail bond organization is jittery, the way Lieutenant Willet was, and he knows that an investigation into the racket will cause cracks all along the line."

The silence was so deep that North could hear himself breathe. He wet his lips and continued:

"He couldn't even stand a public trial of somebody else for the murder of Morty Clock. He had to prevent Lucy from being caught and tried, because a lot of dirt would be thrown about in a long and sensational trial. Some of it would surely stick to him. There were too many people involved for a fool-proof racket. Besides, he wasn't sure that the girl in Clock's apartment hadn't recognized him. It's likely that he hadn't had a good look at her, else he would have taken action against her before. But when he saw the initials on the locket and saw me walking out of the garage with it, he put two and two together and knew who the girl was."

Bayer was staring at North with hard eyes. Eagle's smile was pasted to his handsome face.

"Wait a minute," Shea said. "You say the killer saw the locket. But you didn't let it out of your hands from the moment it was found."

"That's right. But there were two men with me when the locket was found. Eagle and Lieutenant Bayer."

"Say, are you trying to pin this on me?" Bayer exclaimed.

"How else would the killer have known I had the locket?"

Eagle stroked his chin. "You may be right at that. But you can't be sure the murderer didn't recognize Lucy in the foyer. Perhaps he came to eliminate her."

"And arrive a minute before Kenny entered the house?" North said. "There's a limit to coincidence. He followed me from the garage. He was worried; he had to know what I intended to do with the locket. If I destroyed it to protect Lucy, then he would have to take no more risky steps. He was delayed because he had to park his car some distance away; if he had to do any killing, he couldn't afford to have his car seen too near my house. He walked the rest of the way. Perhaps he saw Kenny standing outside the French doors and waited behind the hedges until Kenny entered. Perhaps he arrived when Kenny was already inside. At any rate, he heard Kenny demand the locket."

"That was as bad news for him as for me, but for a different reason. I said he couldn't stand anybody being tried for Clock's murder. So he stepped into the room and murdered Kenny. He would have killed me too, but he had seen Kenny fire at me and saw the blood on my head and thought I was already dead. I imagine he forced Lucy to search me; otherwise he would have seen his mistake."

Bayer burst out: "Sounds like a pipe-dream to me. Where's your evidence?"

"The elimination of everybody but you and Eagle. The rest is a matter of footprints and timing and motive."

SHEA raised his head another inch or two; the effort cost him pain. "So I was right. Lieutenant Bayer, as head of a Homicide Squad, isn't in the best position to head a racket like that. Not nearly in as good a position as Eagle, who, working out of the D.A.'s office, had contact with every precinct in the city."

"That's right," North said quietly. "But there is something more concrete: Eagle's small feet. The footprints in my yard of the man who carried Lucy out of the house were made by small shoes. Bayer has a cop's foot, whereas Eagle wears no more than a size eight."

Eagle's face showed scorn. "You call that proof?"

North shrugged. "Call it what you like. You forget another bit of evidence that will lead you straight to the chair, Sonny Boy. Lucy saw you murder Kenny. Lucy knows you abducted her."

Tension held them all motionless. Eagle glanced at Lieutenant Bayer, then looked North over very carefully.

"You're smart as hell, aren't you, North? I've tried to spring traps like that on criminals. Any answer at all will sound incriminating. Thanks but I'm not having any."

This is it, North thought. This would be what all his talking had been leading to—the final tug at a murderer's nerves already at the snapping point.

He turned to Shea. "Whose idea was it to take this road?"

"Eagle's. I didn't question him when he suggested I turn up it. I hoped he would lead me to the place where he has Lucy. But before we had got anywhere, he pulled the gun on me."

"Nerves," North said. "He couldn't hold out. He was afraid you'd beat him to the punch."

Smiling icily, North twisted his head to Eagle. "Lucy is near here, Sonny

Boy. You hadn't time to hide her well and it had to be close to the city, because you had to rush right back and make your complaint to Winthrop that I had walked off with the locket. You didn't want to, but you couldn't get out of it. Since then you hadn't had a chance to go to her, and you had to, to make sure you'd made no mistake. You preferred going in Shea's car, with Shea driving. Less risk than using your own car, and at the same time you could eliminate Shea whom you feared most."

Eagle's gun hung stiffly from his fingers. He licked his lips. "Those are just words that don't mean a thing."

"Don't they, Sonny Boy? Within a few hours a thousand men will be scouring this neighborhood. They'll find Lucy. If she's alive, she'll talk. If she's dead, you'll have left some clue on her body. Perhaps footprints in your hurry. You know I'm an authority on footprints and—"

Eagle's gun thundered.

Lieutenant Bayer took a halting step and pitched forward on his face. The beam of his flashlight lay in a thin stream along the ground.

"Don't try it, North!" Eagle barked.

NORTH straightened up, sick with failure. His gun was in Bayer's pocket, and Bayer lay a good ten feet away. Shea was still propped up on one elbow, his face a bloody granite mask.

Eagle stood slim and boyish behind his flashlight, but the gun in his hand was not steady. Still, it was a gun and he knew how to use it.

"I'm always a step ahead of you, North. You were depending on Bayer, but the poor sap was more interested in what you were saying than in watching me. I could see through your scheme like through a window. You

didn't want Bayer to take me to headquarters. You were thinking of Lucy, of the fact that there must be no delay, and you tried to talk me into giving myself away at once."

"It seems I succeeded," North said with quiet weariness.

Eagle tried to laugh, but it came out as a bitter, defeated sound. "A lot of good that will do you. Or Lucy, for that matter."

"Then you didn't kill her when you killed Kenny?" Shea said hollowly from the ground.

"Damn you, do you think I could shoot down a defenseless girl standing there and gaping at me in horror!"

The sudden outburst startled North. Then he understood. From the first Eagle had had to drive himself into killing. Fear or conscience or both had made each murder a terrific ordeal. And this was the worst of all, trying to work himself up into murdering two—or three, if Bayer still lived—men in cold blood.

"I knocked her out instead," Eagle was saying. His voice dropped to a mutter, as if he were talking to himself. "But I was just putting it off. I've got to finish her tonight." His voice rose again, shrilly; his knuckles showed white on the gun. "Ready or not, here it comes."

North gasped: "In the name of God, mercy! You can't shoot me down like a dog. Please!" His knees started to buckle and his eyeballs rolled to the top of his head.

Eagle paused to savor his triumph over this man whom he hated above all others. "Can't take it!" he chortled hysterically. "I'm Sonny Boy—but you, the hardboiled inspector, fainting at the sight of a gun!"

In his enjoyment of the moment, Eagle did not notice Shea pulling himself up from the ground. Then he

glimpsed him in a half-crouch at his side like some incredible monster of the woods. Eagle swung his gun and flashlight toward him.

North, with his knees almost touching the ground, dipped his head and bucked. Out of the corner of his eye Eagle saw him coming and kicked him in the face. North fell away.

BUT there was no shot. In the shadow world stabbed by the jerky beam in Eagle's left hand, North saw that Shea had thrown himself forward and was clinging frantically to Eagle's gun-wrist. Eagle was bracing himself against the downward pull of the other's body and was trying to swing his gun to the face beneath him.

North crawled over to where Lieutenant Bayer lay. As he plucked the gun from Bayer's fingers, he heard the lieutenant's ragged breathing. He did not seem to be mortally wounded, but he would be out of this, and everything else, for a long time to come.

Weak from the kick, North twisted on the ground. He saw Eagle strike out at Shea's head with the flashlight and he heard metal strike bone. Shea's grip relaxed as the light blinked out.

An instant later North shot, but with the flashlight out there was only blackness where Eagle and Shea had been. A body crashed through the underbrush, like a beast fleeing in panic. And then silence.

North sat up and wiped blood from his mouth where Eagle had kicked him. His stomach turned over. "Shea?" he called. "Are you all right?"

"Groggy as hell," came the weak reply. "Those socks left me weak as a kitten or I'd never have let him get away."

"You did fine." North took the flashlight from Bayer's other hand and sat up.

Shea whispered urgently: "Inspector, you can't fail. And you've got to get him alive. For Lucy."

"I'll get him," North said.

THE silence flowed back over the woods. Wavering, North tried to run, but his throbbing head wouldn't let him. Eagle wouldn't dare remain in the woods where he would be trapped in the morning. He'd head for the car and use it for a getaway.

North doused the light for fear of giving himself away. He stumbled over roots and stones and crashed into unseen trees, but he stuck to the path. His ears were strained for the sound of a starting motor which would signify final defeat. The silence remained.

Suddenly he burst out on the road—and there, under the full light of the moon, stood Shea's convertible.

North moved a short distance from the path and waited. Eternal minutes passed. Fear formed a clammy mantle of sweat over his body. Suppose he had figured wrong? Suppose Eagle had decided instead to strike out on foot because the car would be too easily identified? He could fade for days or weeks or forever in the nether world of hunted criminals—while Lucy, tied and gagged in a place nobody but Eagle knew, would starve to death.

Behind him, in the taut stillness, a twig snapped with an explosion like gunfire. North whirled. Roy Eagle stepped out of the woods and into the moonlight.

For a breathless second he gawked at North. In his wild plunge into the woods he had lost the path and without a light had not been able to find it again. Abruptly he remembered the gun in his hand and yanked it up.

North could have killed him, but deliberately he shot low, knocking Eagle's leg out from under him. Eagle's face

was contorted with pain as he tried to support his right wrist with his left hand for a shot. North leaped in and ground his heel into Eagle's wrist.

"I'm still a better man than you, Sonny Boy," North said as he stooped to pick up Eagle's gun.

"For a moment I was afraid you'd kill him," a lazy voice drawled.

Denis Shea stood where the path cleared the woods.

"He'll live long enough to burn in a chair," North said.

Shea was swaying as he moved forward, and through the blood that streaked his face he grinned. He dropped down beside Eagle. "Where's Lucy?"

Eagle lifted his pain-filled eyes. "I'll make a deal. I'll tell you where she is

if—"

Shea pushed Eagle's wounded leg, and Eagle shrieked like a demented woman. He blubbered: "An abandoned farm house on Mill Road, a mile past the highway. She's in the attic."

Still grinning, Shea wobbled to his feet. "Let's get there in a hurry, Pop."

Pop! North repeated the word and liked the sound of it. He felt his wounded scalp and his sore face. Tomorrow he would be as good as new, and in many ways a lot better because of what had happened this day and night.

"We've still a job ahead of us," North said. "We'll have to get Bayer and Eagle into the car and go for Lucy. Do you think you're up to it—son?"

SCIENCE AIDS THE POLICE

THE police are as interested in preventing graft and criminal practices within their own ranks as they are in apprehending any other criminal. One of the practices especially frowned upon is the acceptance of bribes by traffic officers to "let them by this time" for some minor traffic offense.

A very interesting case of this type occurred in Westchester County, New York, because it required scientific means to prove the officer's guilt. A person living in Vermont was stopped by the officer on the charge that he had gone past a red light. Despite the fact that the driver protested and claimed he had not gone through the traffic signal, the officer drew out his ticket book and proceeded to fill one out. As the ticket was being made out, the officer slyly said that the driver would have to appear in court in about a week for his trial. The driver realized that this would involve a rather large expenditure to travel from Vermont and so he offered the policeman \$10.00 to "forget the whole thing." The officer quickly agreed and the driver was permitted to proceed without a ticket.

While the driver was visiting his friends in the same county, he bitterly related the entire case as an example of police injustice in the county. His friend, however, was well acquainted with police regulations and he informed the driver that not only was this only a \$2.00 offense but if he were really guilty he could have paid the fine in less than an hour at the police magistrate's

court. This was a clear case of extortion on the part of the officer.

All these facts were presented to the police chief, who immediately ordered the arrest of the offending officer. The officer was charged with extortion and the police tried to find the ticket that he had started to fill out as evidence for the trial. All the empty tickets in his book were examined but the one in question was not among them and all the tickets which had been issued were accounted for and agreed with the stubs in the book. The man from Vermont had said that the officer had used pencil to make out the ticket and so the officer's ticket book was given to a document expert to determine whether or not it contained any pencil erasures. None could be found but when all the blanks were examined with invisible short light waves, the expert discovered that one ticket in the back of the book had been filled out in ink and then the writing had been carefully removed with a strong chemical.

Enlarged photographs were made of the ticket and it was found that the Vermont man's name had been written on the blank. With this evidence and the stories of the driver and his wife against him, the officer was soon convicted. However, if it had not been for this scientific process, the incriminating evidence would not have been discovered and the police officer might never have been convicted. Crime does not pay—even for a police officer.

—Carter T. Wainwright.

DEATH PROPOSES TO NICK FANE

by ARTHUR NELSON

NICK FANE stood in the bathroom in his shorts and yawned and looked at his face in the mirror above the wash-basin.

It was early yet—early, that is, for Nick—barely ten o'clock. He rubbed the whiskers on his chin, yawned again, and reached for razor and shaving cream.

Then the telephone rang.

Nick scowled. He had an aversion to early morning phone calls, but the depleted condition of his exchequer made no allowances for personal likes or dislikes. He went out into the room that served as an office, crossed to the desk, and picked up the phone. His voice sounded a little sour.

"Nick Fane speaking."

The voice at the other end was low, husky, attractive. It said: "My lawyers have recommended you as a reliable private detective. I want a trained investigator to act as my bodyguard. Would you be interested in a case that would require all of your time for the next two weeks?"

Nick thought it might be nice work to bodyguard the owner of the voice. But he was wary. "Maybe," he said. "Who are your lawyers?"

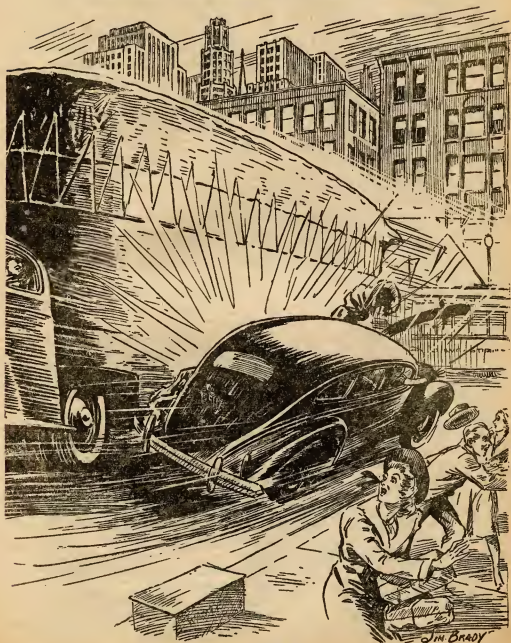
"Denby and Donaldson."

Nick yawned loudly and swore under his breath. Why the hell couldn't he wake up? He was acquainted with Denby and Donaldson by reputation



There was a crash, the sedan tilted dangerously, and fenders crumpled

Nick Fane didn't exactly expect his newest job to turn out to be a proposal of marriage, but that's what it was. And then the shooting began!



only. They were one of the oldest law firms in the Bay District. He could think of no reason for the recommendation. A thought occurred to him. He said: "I don't take divorce cases."

"This is not a divorce case," the pleasantly husky voice assured him. There was a slight pause, then: "I must warn you, Mr. Fane, that I have reason to believe your life will be in danger."

Nick shoved aside the accumulated litter and sat on the edge of the desk dangling one foot. "I don't mind risking my life," he said, and added, "Not if I get paid for it."

"I had planned on paying you two hundred dollars a day, plus all expenses, for your regular work."

Nick wondered if he was talking to Mrs. Santa Claus. He said that would be satisfactory, and waited for the voice to continue. The pause this time was longer. Then the husky voice went on:

"I shall require a—a special service from you for which I'll pay an additional ten thousand dollars."

Nick blinked his eyes in mild astonishment. Ten grand for a couple of weeks work sounded more like a bribe than a salary.

He said, cautiously, "About this special service: Just what would I have to do?"

"I'd prefer to discuss it with you in person. Be at my apartment—the Renview—at eleven-thirty, prepared to leave the city for two weeks. Ask for Miss Kathryn Braden. Don't bother to bring any luggage. You can purchase whatever you need later." The husky voice dropped almost to a whisper. "And, please, Mr. Fane, be very careful. Somebody seems to be aware of every move I make."

IT was eleven-twenty when Nick got out of the taxi on the crest of Nob

Hill and paid off the driver. He stood at the curb with his hands thrust deep in his pockets and gazed up at San Francisco's newest and most expensive apartment house.

A big man, Nick Fane—and tough. Six feet three of black Irishman with a friendly grin that contrasted oddly with the hot flame that burned in his eyes.

He had spent the past hour searching for information about Kathryn Braden. Without finding much. She was an heiress, single, twenty-five, and, if the newspaper pictures were any criterion, an amazingly pretty girl.

A reporter friend had contributed the only real bit of information. She had been engaged to marry a Los Angeles banker named Martin Rand. He had been killed two weeks ago by a hit and run car. Nick wondered if she wanted him to investigate the accident. The driver of the death car had not been apprehended.

He was about to move on when a sardonic voice said: "Mr. Fane, I believe."

Nick turned. Something like an icicle with a lot of legs began to dance a jig on the back of his neck. He had, he thought, never seen a colder more merciless pair of eyes.

The owner of the eyes was as tall as Nick, but thinner. He had a lean, aristocratic face with a long scar on the left side. It started up near the hair line, curved around his eye, and slashed down across his cheek to lift the corner of his mouth in a faintly sardonic grin. It was the scar as much as the eyes that made him look so sinister, Nick decided.

"I'm Fane," he said sourly. "What's on your mind?"

"A little business proposition I wanted to talk over with you."

"I'm busy," Nick said. "Some other time."

"Stand still. Do like the Chief says."

This new voice was thin and harsh. It came from behind Nick. There was a definite prickling sense of danger at the base of Nick's skull. He watched the man with the scar.

"That's excellent advice, Mr. Fane," the guy said.

"My companion isn't entirely responsible for his actions. He's a drug addict, y'know." The cold eyes strayed past Nick to settle speculatively on something farther back. "I shall have to dispose of him someday, of course. Just now he's useful."

Nick had a feeling that he ought to go for his gun and blast this scarfaced man. He didn't. He turned and looked over his shoulder.

HE saw a black Buick parked at the curb directly behind him. A hollow-chested youth looked out at him through the open door. He had a thin, putty-colored face, and the brilliant jumpy eyes of a hop head. A nicotined finger was wrapped around the trigger of a .38. The gun, partly concealed by the youth's hat, was fitted with a silencer.

Nick turned smoldering eyes on the scarfaced man. This was the result of sticking his neck out so early in the morning, he reflected morosely. He was never fully awake or at his best before mid-afternoon.

"The name," he said, "is Nick Fane. You wouldn't have made a mistake?"

"I never make mistakes, Nick. Get in the car."

Nick got in. Scarface climbed in beside him and closed the door. He took a .38, also fitted with a silencer, from a special pocket in the door of the car. The hop head slid under the wheel and the car began to move up the hill.

Nick settled back and watched Scar-

face. The muscles in his stomach twitched. He wasn't exactly afraid, but he never made the mistake of underestimating his opponents. Which might account for the fact that he was still alive after half a dozen years of fighting crime. Nick decided this guy was probably the most dangerous man he'd ever encountered.

He said, casually, "I like to know who I'm doing business with."

"The name's Sheldon—Ricky Sheldon." He lifted the .38 suggestively. "I learned how to use this little gadget in China. It has eighty-seven notches. Dead Japs, y'know." He grinned sardonically. "I made a bet with myself that it'd hold a hundred notches. I'm anxious to win that bet, Mr. Fane."

Nick thought the guy was telling the truth. But he resented being pushed around. "Would smoking be against the rules?"

Ricky Sheldon handed him a silver cigarette case and a book of matches. A flicker of amused contempt showed in the man's slate-colored eyes. Nick got the impression that the guy actually wanted him to start something.

The scarfaced man reached for the cigarette case and the matches with his left hand and dropped them on the seat beside him. "I'm disappointed," he said.

Nick looked puzzled. "Why?"

"You're supposed to be a tough guy. You're not living up to your reputation."

Nick emptied his lungs of smoke. "Just keep shoving me around, brother," he said softly.

THE hop head turned left into Pacific avenue and braked to a stop in front of a three-story apartment house. They crossed a deserted lobby, rode up to the second floor in an automatic elevator, and stepped out into a

long, smelly hallway. The hop head tapped a signal on a door marked 2-C.

A key rattled in the lock, and the door opened. Nick blinked and went into a dingy room. He saw a cheaply furnished apartment with half a dozen chairs and a worn sofa and a table with a deck of cards and three empty glasses on it.

A man and a woman were sitting on the sofa. They were oldish, rather plump, and appeared ill at ease. Nick decided they were not dangerous. The man who had opened the door came over and stood beside Ricky Sheldon.

He was a dark, very dapper young man with a pock marked face and the unwinking stare of a dead fish. Nick catalogued him instantly as a gunman. The hop head was standing on Nick's right and slightly behind him.

A swell spot, Nick reflected gloomily. Ricky Sheldon was the most dangerous. Guys like the hop head and the dapper young man were only dangerous when they had a gun. But the hop head had a gun in his hand and there was no mistaking the bulge under the other guy's left armpit.

"You'd better frisk him, Tony," Ricky Sheldon said.

The dapper young man stepped around behind Nick and searched him with expert ease. He seemed contemptuous of the .25 and tossed it on the table. Then he came back and stood beside the scarfaced man again.

"Get on with your proposition," Nick said. "I got a date."

"That's what I wanted to talk about," Ricky Sheldon said. "You had a date to meet Miss Kathryn Braden at the Renvieu."

Nick wondered how the scarfaced man knew. "You've got your tenses mixed a little, chum. I *have* a date with Miss Braden. And if that's all you wanted to know—" he half turned

toward the table "—I'll take my gun and trot along."

From the corner of his eye, he saw the hop head move. But he was too late. The barrel of the gun clipped him along the side of the jaw. It wasn't a hard blow, but it jarred Nick, knocked him to one knee.

NICK got to his feet slowly, his eyes smoldering with resentment. He ran the tip of his tongue around his teeth to see if they were all there and was mildly surprised to find none of them missing.

The hop head grinned wolfishly. "Answer the Chief's questions."

"Sure," Nick said, and put every ounce of his one hundred and ninety pounds behind the right that lifted the smaller man off the floor, and sent him back to crash against the wall ten feet away.

The gun dropped from his hand, and he slid down the wall, blood dripping from mouth and nostrils. Nick heard the woman on the sofa stifle a scream. He watched Ricky Sheldon. The scarfaced man contemplated his fallen henchman with sardonic eyes.

Tony went over and picked up the gun and put it in his pocket and came back and stood beside Ricky Sheldon.

Nick rubbed his knuckles. "I hate tough guys," he said.

Ricky Sheldon chuckled. "That was neatly done, Nick. I admire efficiency." He eyed Nick quizzically. "I could use a man like you in my organization. The Braden girl offered you less than fifteen thousand dollars. I can afford to be generous. Would half a million dollars interest you?"

Nick set a fresh cigarette between his lips. "It might," he said. "What would I have to do?"

"For the present, just lend me your credentials. I'll call on Miss Braden

in your place."

The guy seemed to know everything, Nick thought. He took three wooden matches from his pocket, gripped them tightly, lifted his right foot, and raked them along the sole of his shoe. Then he kicked Tony in the shin and tossed the three blazing matches at Ricky Sheldon's eyes.

His left hand snapped out, clamped on Ricky Sheldon's gun hand. He heard the plop of the silenced gun, felt the bullet tug at his coat. Then his right exploded against the scarfaced man's jaw.

Nick twisted sidewise and lashed out at the cursing gunman. Tony had a gun three-quarters of the way clear of a shoulder holster when Nick's right buried itself in his stomach. A long right to the jaw and the dark young man lost all interest in the fight.

Nick bent down and scooped up Tony's gun. He saw Ricky Sheldon struggle to a sitting position. He lashed out with the gun barrel and watched the scarfaced man slump to the floor.

Then, still crouched, his flaming eyes swept the room. The old couple were standing now, their arms around each other. Too scared to do anything, Nick thought. The hop head was still on the floor, legs sprawled, arms dangling. But now there was another trickle of blood on his face. It came from a neat hole in the exact center of his forehead where Ricky Sheldon's bullet had caught him.

Nick wiped his prints off the .38 and traded it for the .25. Then he went out into the hall. Half a dozen people were peering cautiously through open doors. Nick pulled his hat brim low and went down the stairs fast. He reached the corner without pursuit and mingled with the crowd on Mason Street.

HE WAS twenty-five minutes late for his appointment. The ornate lobby of the Renview was almost deserted—for which Nick was grateful. He felt embarrassed because of the angry red welt on his jaw. He kept the right side of his face turned away from the clerk while he identified himself and asked for Miss Braden.

"Take the second lift, Mr. Fane. The operator will point out Miss Braden's apartment. She's expecting you."

They stopped at the tenth floor. The boy pointed down the hall. "The number's—there's Miss Braden, in the doorway."

Nick saw a girl framed in an open door and moved toward her. She was wearing gray flannel slacks, a two-tone blue jacket, and hiking shoes. The shoes puzzled Nick. He followed her into an expensively appointed room. Her eyes questioned him.

"You've had trouble."

"A little," Nick admitted. "A couple of guys got me mixed up with eighty-seven Japs they'd been playing around with. I had to identify myself."

Her eyes were puzzled. Nick grinned and shoved his finger through the hole Ricky Sheldon's bullet had burned in his coat.

"Will the swindle sheet stand for a new suit?"

She made an impatient little gesture and nodded. The husky voice throbbed with suppressed emotion. "Who were they? What did they want?"

"Well," Nick said slowly, "they asked most of the questions. The big guy's name is Ricky Sheldon. His pal's name is Tony. I didn't wait to find out about the others."

"Then there were more than two of them?"

"I counted five of them," Nick said. He watched her. "There was a fight. One of them got knocked off."

She took that one without flinching. "I'm glad," she said. "They murdered Martin. I know they did."

"How do you know?"

"I saw it." Nick caught a glimpse of the swift pain at the back of her eyes. "I was standing there by the window watching Martin cross the street. The car swerved out, hit him and went on down the hill."

"What kind of car?"

"I don't know. It was dark. Martin and I had been talking about our honeymoon. When he left, I stood by the window to watch him cross the street."

"That reminds me," Nick said, "have you frisked this joint for a dictaphone?"

She looked startled. "I hadn't thought of that."

"There must be one here," Nick said. "They overheard you talking to me this morning."

HE STOOD in the center of the room and set fire to a fresh cigarette. He turned slowly. It was a large room, but the modernistic furniture eliminated hiding places.

A big double window on the north side, affording an excellent view of the bay, caught Nick's eye. There was a built-in book case beneath the window frame. It was, Nick decided, the logical place. The telephone was on a stand at the end of the book case.

He found the dictaphone hanging above a two-volume set of Shakespeare, and jerked the wires loose. His teeth showed whitely against his dark skin. "Now we can talk without being overheard."

Kathryn Braden eyed the dictaphone in distaste. She crossed the room to a lowboy and poured rye whiskey into two glasses. Nick watched her. A hell of a pretty girl, he reassured himself. Her eyes were the color of the smoke curling up from the tip of his cigarette.

They blended perfectly with the blue-black sheen of her hair.

She handed him one of the glasses and indicated a chair. "Sit there, please."

She moved over and sat on a divan half a dozen feet away. Nick sat in the chair, aware that it had been placed there deliberately. The light from the window shown full on his face. But he didn't mind being looked at—not at nearly a grand a day, he didn't.

He sprawled in the chair and sipped his drink and watched Kathryn Braden watch him. He looked big and a little dangerous. The lump on his jaw lent a tough cast to his pleasantly pugnacious features. The liquor warmed him. He decided he was going to like this case.

"Now that we're all cozy," he said, "you might tell me what I'm supposed to do."

"Marry me."

Nick choked on his drink. He swore and leaned forward in the chair. "Look, sister," he said sourly, "if this is a gag, I don't want to play."

She flushed. "I'm not joking. And don't call me sister. I think it would be better if you called me Kit."

Nick studied her for a minute, then chuckled and leaned back in his chair. "Okay, Kit, I apologize. Now let's start all over again. Why do you want to marry me?"

"I don't," she said. "But I've got to marry somebody because my great-grandfather had an obsession."

NICK swore again and finished his drink. He got up and went over to the lowboy and splashed some rye into his glass and came back and sat on the divan beside her.

"What the hell's your great-grandfather's obsessions got to do with it?"

"When he was twenty-five the doc-

tors gave him six months to live. That was in 1865. He went up in the mountains above Downieville and found a gold mine. He remained there working the mine. The high altitude restored his health. He was 102 years old when he died last May."

"About the obsession," Nick said.

"I've just told you. He stayed in the mountains for seventy-seven years, not even coming out for a short visit. He built an immense stone house, named it Mountain Home, and insisted that the rest of the family live there with him."

"And did they?"

"No. And as a result, the entire family, with the exception of Father and Great-grandfather Braden, were killed in the earthquake and fire in 1906." She paused and shivered. "I don't blame them for not wanting to live at Mountain Home. Every time I see the place, I think of Dracula's Castle."

Nick chuckled. "Not haunted, is it?"

A fleeting smile touched the corners of her sensitive mouth. Nick thought he must be doing all right. "The house is so lonely and isolated that even ghosts shun it. There's a little town about a mile down the mountain called Pine Creek. It's part of the estate. Nearly everyone who lives there works at the mine."

"Are your parents living?"

"Mother was killed in an automobile accident in 1926. I don't know what happened to Father. He seemed to think he was responsible for Mother's death. He—just left."

Nick thought of Ricky Sheldon. "What sort of looking man was he?"

"Rather short, about five feet nine, dark brown hair, brown eyes—"

"Skip it," Nick said. He changed the subject. "You didn't finish telling

me about Great-grandfather Braden's obsession."

"He added a codicil to his will stipulating that all of the heirs must be married in Pine Creek before their twenty-fifth birthday and spend a honeymoon of at least two weeks at Mountain Home."

"I see," Nick said. "And you want to marry me so you'll be eligible?"

"Because of Martin's death, the lawyers are allowing me to do it this way. We'll be married in Pine Creek and live at Mountain Home for two weeks. Later, we can arrange a quiet divorce."

"Just why did you pick on me?"

Kit reached for a cigarette. Nick held a light and watched the puzzled expression in the smoky blue eyes. "Because I believe somebody is trying to kill me."

Nick decided not to press this point just now. He thought so, too. "According to the papers, the estimated value of the estate is five million dollars. What makes you think I'll play fair?"

"I had you investigated pretty thoroughly. You're hard boiled, but nobody ever accused you of dishonesty."

Nick cocked an eyebrow at her. "Nobody ever gave me a chance to get my hands on five million bucks before," he told her somberly. "When do we start?"

"Now. Tomorrow is my twenty-fifth birthday. I've got to be married before midnight."

Nick thought the whole thing was a little foolish. But he didn't know very much about the ethics of lawyers.

"About this Ricky Sheldon," he said. He described the scar-faced man. "Any idea who he is, or what he wants?"

Kit shook her head. "There doesn't seem to be any way that he could benefit by my death. In that event, the bulk

of the estate is to be used to endow a Medical Research Laboratory."

Nick shrugged. "Well, that's all, I guess, except the location of Pine Creek."

Kit took a road map from the window ledge and spread it out on her knees. "Pine Creek isn't on the map, but it's about here." She indicated with her finger. "The road is half way between Downieville and Sierra City. These penciled lines show the shortest route. Martin checked it one night."

Nick folded the map and put it in his pocket. He stood up and rubbed out his cigarette. "By the way," he said suddenly, "did it occur to you that the State of California requires three days' notice of intention to wed?"

Kit nodded and went into another room. She came out a moment later with a marriage license. "Mr. Denby obtained it. Don't ask me how. All it needs is your signature."

On the way down in the elevator, Kit said that she had sent Marie, her personal maid, and a cook on ahead to prepare the house for them.

"Nobody has lived there for nearly three months," she said, "except Charlie Lee, the Chinese caretaker."

IT WAS just one o'clock when Nick slid under the wheel of Kit Braden's car and kicked the starter. He had only a vague idea of the distance to Pine Creek, but he thought it would be a good idea to arrive before dark. He swung the car around the corner and started down the hill.

Coming into the intersection at California and Stockton streets, Kit cried out in sudden alarm. But Nick had already seen the danger. A semi-trailer, apparently out of control, was roaring down Stockton street. A crash seemed inevitable.

Nick twisted the wheel savagely. The

big car screamed in protest. But it came around, heading straight for the truck. Nick's strength avoided a head-on collision. The body of the trailer crashed against the car. They rocked dangerously. Glass showered Nick. He heard the fender tearing loose. Then the left front wheel crumpled and the car stopped abruptly.

The steering wheel held Nick, but Kit was thrown violently forward to the floor. Nick helped her back on to the seat. She didn't appear to be injured.

At the sound of a loud crash, they looked up. The truck had turned into California street, sideswiping two cars. It was now stopped, half blocking the street. Nick saw the driver leap from the cab and race down the hill.

He thought of giving chase, but instead helped Kit from the car. She was trembling violently, but except for a couple of bruises, was unhurt.

A crowd was collecting. Nick's hot eyes searched the faces without seeing Ricky Sheldon or Tony. He wanted to get away before the cops arrived. He took hold of Kit's arm.

"There's a drug store on the corner," he said in a loud voice. "We'll call the police and get a taxi."

They went into the drug store. Nick said: "Call your lawyers to take care of this. Make it snappy."

BUT they didn't get away with it. A radio car screamed to a stop out in front before Kit reached the phone booth. Both officers jumped out and ran inside. They stopped when they saw Nick.

Nick waved at the one in the doorway, grinned at the other one and said, "Hi, Sam. We were just going to call you boys."

"Yeah, I bet." Sam looked skeptical. "What's the idea of running away from the scene of an accident?"

"That was the other guy," Nick said. "We didn't run."

"Then what're you doing here?"

"Calling the cops," Nick said. "The other guy run into us."

Sam made a rude noise with his lips. "You never called a copper in your life," he said. "What'd the driver look like?"

"Short guy wearing striped cover-all. Long hair, no hat. He headed for Chinatown."

Sam nodded to the cop in the doorway to make a report, then turned puzzled eyes on Nick. "That truck was reported stolen half an hour ago. Why the hell would anybody steal a thing like that?"

"That's your grief," Nick said. "And now if you're finished, we'll run along. You know where to find me. You can reach Miss Braden at the Renvue."

Sam, getting a close-up view of Nick's eyes, apparently decided not to object. He watched them leave in moody silence.

"Now what?" Kit wanted to know.

"We'll get my car and head for Pine Creek," Nick said.

Half an hour later they were rolling swiftly along the Sacramento road in Nick's flame-colored Packard. The Packard was Nick's special pride. It had cost him nearly a year's pay, but it was worth it. Nick had once lost a fat fee because a heavy car had walked away from his light coupe. There were no stock cars on the highway with speed enough to leave the Packard.

Shortly after leaving Sacramento Nick began to have a persistent feeling that something was amiss. Something important he'd neglected. Kit finally solved the problem. She said: "I'm hungry."

THEY stopped at a roadside restaurant and ate chicken and drank a bottle of wine and talked. Not about

danger and sudden death, but about the things two young people talk about over a bottle of wine. In short, themselves. They wasted two hours.

"But after all," Kit said, "a girl should know something about the man she's going to marry."

Nick lowered his left eyebrow. "Even if it's only for two weeks," he said morosely.

He spread the map on the table and studied it for a minute. "How long ago did you put these marks on the map?"

"When Martin and I first discussed our honeymoon. It was at least a month ago."

"I think we ought to find another road."

"There isn't much choice," Kit pointed out. "Especially after we get up in the mountains."

"How about this one." Nick traced a black line with his finger. "North to Oroville, then east to Comptonville. It's farther, but it might be safer."

Kit's smoky blue eyes were troubled. "Have you ever driven a car over an unimproved dirt road in the High Sierras?"

Nick said no. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I've never driven a car over any kind of road in the High Sierras. But if there's a road there, I can drive it."

Kit sighed. "All right, Nick. Whatever you say."

They made good time to Oroville, but shortly after they turned east the road began to climb. Then abruptly, the pavement ended and Nick was forced to slow down.

A strong headwind was blowing down off the mountains. It smacked the car with a giant hand, rocking it back and forth, forcing Nick to grip the wheel tightly. Although he kept his eyes fastened on the road, he couldn't help noticing how the mountains seemed to

grow; how the bigness rushed out at them.

It was dusk when they eased down the steep grade and crossed the bridge into Downville. "Keep an eye out for a black Buick," Nick warned.

But there was no sign of the Buick, or of any pursuit once they were out on the highway again. Darkness rolled down swiftly, and Nick switched on the headlights.

"The turn-off is just ahead," Kit said presently. "It's on the left side."

Nick slowed down. The headlights picked out a hole in the granite wall ahead. There were no cars in sight. Nick switched off the lights and took the turn into the dirt road. A hundred yards farther along, he stopped, and they watched half a dozen cars roar past on the highway.

"I guess we lost them for the time being," Nick said.

"I hope so." Kit seemed worried. "I didn't think it necessary to warn Marie and the cook to be careful. There isn't anyone at Mountain Home except Charlie Lee, and he's past sixty."

ALTHOUGH climbing rather steeply, the road was fairly good, and fifteen minutes later Nick pulled up in front of a neat white bungalow on the outskirts of Pine Creek. A sign nailed to the picket fence read: ALDEN P. NORTON — ASSAYER — JUSTICE OF THE PEACE.

Mr. Norton, a round little man with twinkling blue eyes and a bald head, was just finishing his evening meal and was eager to be of assistance. Recognizing Kit, his eagerness changed to confusion. He thought it would be nice to call in some of Pine Creek's prominent citizens to celebrate.

Nick vetoed this. He said: "We plan on throwing a party later and inviting all of Miss Braden's old friends."

Mr. Norton called in his wife and daughter to witness the ceremony. Nick stood beside Kit and said "I do" in the right places and looked at Kit's fresh young beauty and thought morosely of the next two weeks.

Before leaving, Nick asked Mr. Norton if there had been any strangers about lately.

"I didn't see anyone," Mr. Norton said. "But Jake Hoffman said a man and a woman passed through town. They took the Mountain Home road."

"What time was that?"

"Jake didn't say. But he did mention they were driving fast."

A full moon was showing above the tops of the peaks when Nick took the left-hand turn out of Pine Creek. He was grateful for the added light. In fact, before they had covered three hundred yards, the palms of his hands were wet with sweat. He gritted his teeth and dropped his hands, one at a time, to rub them dry on his leg.

On the right, a towering granite wall reached for the moon; and on the left, there didn't seem to be anything. This must be the jumping-off place he'd heard so much about, Nick decided. He also decided he wasn't going to jump.

For the next fifteen minutes, Nick sweat blood. At every turn in the road he expected to find Ricky Sheldon waiting. He wished he'd taken time out to pick up another gun. The little .25 with its two-inch barrel wasn't a very effective long-range weapon. And Nick had a hunch he was going to need a gun before this thing was finished.

THEY came out finally on a flat tableland. The road turned left for a hundred yards along the bank of a creek, then right across a narrow bridge. Ahead loomed the bleak, gray walls of Mountain Home.

Nick sighed in relief. Then he re-

called Kit's remark "I think of Dracula's Castle" and shivered. It was the kind of house the movies tried to reproduce in horror films. Two ground floor windows showed pale yellow light; the rest of the house was dark.

Nick drove into a walled court yard and parked beside a station wagon. "I guess Marie and the cook arrived safely," Kit said in a relieved voice.

She got out and walked toward the house. Nick followed. Kit was half a dozen steps ahead, moving along a dingy hall toward a lighted door, when Nick entered the house.

He saw her turn into the room, saw her recoil. Her husky voice broke in a scream. He darted ahead, snapping the safety catch on the .25. She turned, caught hold of his arm.

"They're dead!" she gasped.

"Who's dead?"

"Marie," she said. "Marie and Charlie Lee."

Nick whipped past her into the room, his flaming eyes searching the shadows. It was a large, high-ceilinged room, crowded with heavy, overstuffed furniture—places for a dozen people to conceal themselves.

A small blonde girl was crumpled on the floor to the right of the door. The right side of her head was a mass of clotted blood. The Chinese was sprawled on the stones before the fireplace. He'd been shot several times in the chest.

The light came from an old-fashioned kerosene lamp on a table in the center of the room. Nick couldn't see anyone, but he felt a definite prickling sensation of danger at the base of his skull.

He wasn't sure whether the lamp would explode or not, but he snapped a quick shot at it. There was a tinkle of broken glass; the light flickered a moment, then went out. But almost in-

stantly a flashlight sliced through the dark, spotlighting Nick.

"Hold it, tough guy." Tony's voice stabbed out at him from across the room. "It'd be a pleasure to blast you."

Nick held it, his face expressionless, but he was raging inwardly. He'd been caught as easily as a kid in a watermelon patch.

"Drop your gun." This time it was Ricky Sheldon who spoke from behind the flashlight. And when Nick had complied, he called, "All right, Emil."

FOOTSTEPS sounded in the hall and a small, flat-chested man came into the room carrying a gasoline lantern. He glanced about nervously, crossed to the table and put the lantern on it. Then he slumped to a chair as if the effort had exhausted him.

Ricky Sheldon and Tony came out into the center of the room. Nick noted with grim joy that the scar-faced man's nose was puffed and that his lip was cut and one tooth was missing.

Ricky Sheldon smiled sardonically. But the smile didn't reach his eyes. He indicated an old-fashioned horse-hair sofa with a red plush covering. "Sit there, please. You too, Miss Braden."

They went over and sat on the sofa. Kit said: "Look here, Mr. Sheldon, if it's money you want, I'll pay any reasonable amount."

"That's very kind of you, Miss Braden. I want five million dollars."

"Five million dollars!" Kit gasped. "You're joking, of course?"

"Perhaps I expressed myself badly, Miss Braden. What I really want is the Braden estate. I'll get it too," he added confidently.

"But—" Kit made a helpless gesture. "How?"

"It's quite simple." The scar-faced man dragged a chair around and sat down facing them. "Sixteen years ago

your father disappeared, Miss Braden. Seven months later—in May, 1927, to be exact—a man named James Braden was married in Chehalis, Washington.”

Kit gasped.

“No need to be upset, Miss Braden. This man was not your father. Or at least, I don’t think he was. According to Mrs. Braden, he was an illiterate lumber-jack. He was accidentally killed in a lumber camp a year later. That was just two weeks before the birth of his son, James Braden, Junior. The boy is now in San Francisco with his mother and step-father.”

Nick was beginning to get it, and he didn’t like it. He said: “You’re not going into court with a flimsy story like that.”

“Flimsy?” The cold eyes laughed at him. “You made a mistake this morning, Nick. You should have killed me when you had the chance.”

Nick thought this was probably true. “Don’t rush me,” he said in a sour voice. “I’ll get around to it presently.”

RICKY SHELTON laughed. “We can prove by the bureau of vital statistics at Chehalis, Washington that James Braden is buried there. The boy’s birth certificate will prove that James Braden was his father. We have specimens of handwriting from Miss Braden’s apartment. That’s where Emil comes in. Emil is an artist—with a pen. We have two letters that will clinch the thing.”

“They might ask her why she waited so long,” Nick said.

“We’ve got the answer to that one, too. The ex-Mrs. Braden will say that she had no inkling of her first husband’s identity until after the papers published the story of the accidental death of—Miss Kathryn Braden.”

Nick felt Kit press against him. The

hand on his arm was as cold as ice. He said: “Mind telling us how you’re going to accomplish this accidental death?”

“You’ll each be given just enough chloroform to make you helpless. Then we’ll load you into your car, along with the body of this young lady, and start you down the grade toward Pine Creek.”

Nick sat very still. So this was it. He’d been playing tag with death for a long time, but it looked as if the old man with the scythe had finally tagged him. He took a deep breath. There was just one chance. He shook out cigarettes—one for himself and one for Kit—and raked a match along the sole of his shoe.

Ricky Sheldon laughed. “The match trick won’t work this time, Nick.”

Nick said no. He squeezed Kit’s hand and stood up. “I’ve got another trick, though,” he said, and moved deliberately across the room to stand in front of the two men.

“Take it easy,” Tony snarled. “I’ll—”

“Go ahead,” Nick invited. “Then try to explain away the slugs when you go to collect the dough.”

“Don’t shoot,” Ricky Sheldon said.

“That’s right,” Nick grinned. “If you shoot me you shoot hell out of your chances of getting your hands on that dough. There’s a couple of things you guys overlooked. First, I married Miss Braden an hour ago. By this time, everybody in Pine Creek knows it.”

“That won’t affect my plan,” the scarfaced man said.

“Maybe not,” Nick said. “The second point’s a bit tougher.” He stabbed his finger at Ricky Sheldon. “Did you think I was going to bend down and sniff that damned chloroform without a fight?” He stepped back a pace and regarded the two men specula-

tively. His eyes were almost yellow now. "You can't afford to shoot me, and in a fight, I think I can take you both."

Emil stood up. He glanced about the room nervously, coughed a couple of times, then went over and sat down on a chair in the corner farthest from the three men.

Ricky Sheldon was standing now. He dropped the gun into his pocket and grinned wolfishly. "You caught me off base once, Nick. No man ever did that before. In a rough and tumble fight, I think I could take you. But I never give a sucker an even break. With Tony's help it'll be a cinch."

THINGS happened fast after that.

A large, woman's purse zipped past Nick's ear to land with a loud smack in the center of Ricky Sheldon's face. Nick's heart leaped. But he didn't stop to think about it.

He snapped a hard right to Ricky Sheldon's solar plexus. Then twisted, catlike, to dispose of Tony quickly. But the pock-marked little gunman was already in action. He clipped Nick with the silencer attachment on the barrel of his gun.

Nick felt swift pain rip through his head. His eyes blurred; his legs refused to hold his weight. The groping fingers of his left hand closed around Tony's ankle. He rolled under the table, jerking hard, Tony spilled over backwards, and Nick heard the gun skid along the floor.

Fighting away the blackness, Nick came from under the table gripping the legs of a heavy chair. Ricky Sheldon had recovered. He was moving in swiftly. Nick heaved the chair at him, paused long enough to kick Tony in the ribs, then dived for the gun.

A boot thudded into Nick's side. The pain of it made him dizzy. Then Ricky

Sheldon closed with him. The two big men rolled over and over on the floor crashing into furniture. They bit and gouged, used knees and feet and elbows. Then they were on their feet slugging.

From the corner of his eye, Nick saw Tony roll over on the floor and reach for the gun. There was a flash of flannel-clad legs as Kit darted in and kicked the gun from his hand. Nick had a momentary feeling of regret that his marriage to this black haired girl was only a business arrangement.

Ricky Sheldon was nearly as big as Nick, and plenty tough. The two men stood there, toe to toe, slugging each other with everything they had. For a minute, Nick was busy. Then he managed to maneuver the scarfed man around and look past him. He saw Tony toss a long right at Kit. The blow caught her high on the forehead knocking her down.

NICK went a little crazy then. He ducked, twisted away from Ricky Sheldon, and reached Tony in two strides. His big fists hammered the smaller man back against the wall. Held him there with punishing blows.

Then something exploded against the side of his head. He was on the floor fighting desperately to keep his senses. Through a haze he saw Ricky Sheldon coming at him with a chair held high. He tried to roll aside. His hand touched something hard and cold. Tony's gun!

Nick never had any recollection of picking up the gun, or of pointing it, just of feeling it buck in his hand. Then the chair descended on his head and a wave of blackness engulfed him.

Nick came out of it slowly. His head ached, and so did everything else. He lay there puzzling over the sound of many voices. After a while, he opened his eyes.

He was on a bed. Kit was standing beside the bed holding his right hand. A little man with a mustache and a goatee was standing on the other side of the bed holding his left wrist and looking at a watch.

"He's coming out of it now," the little man said.

Nick said: "Who're you?"

Kit bent down impulsively and pressed her cheek to his face. It sounded like she said, "Nick, darling."

"Just keep him quiet, Mrs. Fane," the little man said. "I'll shoo all of these people away and be back in the morning."

He went out and closed the door. Kit sat on the edge of the bed still holding Nick's hand.

Nick said: "What—"

Kit put her fingers to his lips. "You're not to talk. You killed Ricky Sheldon. Tony and Emil confessed. The San Francisco police will arrest the others."

"Yeah," Nick said, "but who were all of those people?"

"It was Mr. Norton's idea," Kit explained. "He thought it would be nice to shivaree us. One of his friends was a deputy sheriff. Nice of him, wasn't it?"

Nick said: "Yeah." His voice sounded a little sour. "Well, I guess that washes it up."

Kit said, "Yes" in a small voice. "But there's still the honeymoon," she added. "And who can tell what will happen in two weeks?"

THE END

A MAN WITH A NEW SET OF FINGERPRINTS

EVER since the use of fingerprints has been adopted as a method of identifying criminals, the culprits have tried to find ways of changing their prints to foil the police. Some have used acid or fire to alter their prints, but one of the most ingenious cases was that of Robert James Pitts, who was recently apprehended in Texas.

Picked up by H. Ray Owens and R. C. Lovelace of the Texas State Highway Patrol, while hitchhiking near El Paso, Pitts was booked for vagrancy and when the police discovered he had no selective service registration card he was hooked by federal authorities. The prisoner gave his name as Paul Cline and when the police tried to fingerprint him they found that there were no friction ridges on the first joints of any of his fingers or thumbs. Pitts, alias Cline, laughed at the police and boasted that he had had his prints destroyed by an operation in May, 1941. He had had the flesh removed from all his fingers and thumb tips and replaced with flesh and skin from his chest.

The operation was performed by cutting five pieces of skin two inches wide from each side of his chest. The pieces were not cut completely from the chest but were left attached by one side of each of the ten flaps. The doctor then cut away most of the flesh on the end joint of each finger and thumb and Pitts' arms were then folded across his chest. Then the fresh cut side of each of the flaps was sewed to each of the

fresh cut finger tips and his hands and arms were taped to his chest. He remained in this position until the skin of his chest began to grow onto the finger and thumb tips. The finger and thumb flaps were then completely severed from the chest and trimmed. The end joints of the fingers and thumbs on Pitts' hands were now covered with skin from his chest and did not have the papillary ridges which serve as the identification in fingerprint recording.

However, when Pitts found that he was going to be charged with violation of the Draft Law, a federal offense, he quickly gave his true identity and said he was wanted by the Wilkesboro, N. C., police on a felony charge.

Fingerprints were made of the prisoner which included the second joints of the fingers and thumbs on both hands and they were sent to the F.B.I. as well as to the Police Department at Charlotte, N. C. Both places readily verified the true identity of Pitts by the papillary ridges of the second joints.

The list of Pitts' crimes which included burglary, auto thefts, and blackmail, just to mention a few, show why he was so willing to go to such expense and suffer such pain to hide his identity. But modern criminal detection and law enforcement has been perfected to such an extent that criminals cannot get away with such tricks no matter how clever they are.

—L. Standish.

FEDERAL POLICE AGENCIES

AT THE present time there are over fifty departments, bureaus, and agencies of the Federal government that perform some policing activity either as its main objective or as an auxiliary duty. About eight major agencies, employing 7,000 persons, handle most of their activities involving enforcement of penal statutes.

It is up to the Intelligence Bureau of Internal Revenue to handle violations of the internal revenue laws.

The Enforcement Division of the Alcohol Tax Unit tracks down violators of the laws which put taxes on intoxicating beverages.

The Division of Investigation and Patrol of the Bureau of Customs is continually on the look-out for smugglers and persons making illegal importations.

The Secret Service Division has charge of counterfeiting and forgery violations of the law.

The Bureau of Narcotics has an investigative

body to handle violators of statutes controlling narcotic drugs.

To the post office inspectors are assigned the task of discovering mail losses, mail depredations, and the violation of any postal laws.

The Immigration Border Patrol covers the smuggling into this country of aliens and other similar crimes.

The F.B.I. is the catch-all police agency of the Federal government since they have full police jurisdiction over all crimes not specifically assigned to any other Federal police agency.

In addition to these agencies, there are over forty other agencies such as the office of Indian affairs, the Public Health Service, and the Securities and Exchange Commission that have police powers and duties in addition to their regular duties, but policing is not their primary purpose. All of these agencies together comprise our Federal police force.

CRIMINAL AND CIVIL LAWS

TO CLEAR the confused opinions of just what criminal and civil law is we would like to explain it somewhat.

That branch or division of law which defines crimes, treats of their nature and provides for their punishment is called criminal law. There are certain acts or omissions which, because of their nature and effect, strike at the very roots of the public peace, health, welfare, morals, justice, safety, or convenience, and affect the rights secured by the government to all its citizens or subjects. Because of the importance and effect of those acts or omissions upon the community as a whole, the state prohibits them and punishes

the offender by a criminal action in the name of the state. The main idea is the punishment of the offender for his act.

Civil law, as distinguished from criminal law, is that portion of the law dealing with the rights, duties and privileges of the individual citizen or subject, and with the method of enforcing in courts such rights, duties and privileges through actions at law brought by the injured individual. The essential idea is the prevention of further injury or the payment of compensation to a party for the injury already suffered by him through interference with his private rights.

CORPUS DELICTI

IT IS the common belief that the term corpus delicti means the body of the deceased. This is not correct. Actually, the term refers to the body of the offense, or in simpler words, the facts and situations which go to make up the commission of a crime. Since a crime involves some specific loss or injury, it must first be proved. The loss or injury such as a person dead in a murder case, property missing in a larceny case, a house burned in an arson case, etc. Therefore, the corpus delicti, or body of the offense, actually includes all facts relating to the commission of a particular crime and the fact

that it was committed by some human agent.

Establishing the corpus delicti is vital in the field of police investigation. Courts follow an exacting rule of evidence which requires that no person shall be convicted of a crime on the strength of his confession alone. The crime must be proved by some evidence other than that supplied by the defendant. It must be outside, independent evidence, apart from that given by the defendant. The doctrine of corpus delicti was brought into being as a means of assuring that an innocent man should not pay for a crime he had not committed.

DEATH OF THE HEADLESS WOMAN

by K. WEBSTER

It's a weird thing to be accused of murdering a woman who already is headless!

THE subject of the life-size painting was a girl surrounded by tanks, motors and glass tubes. She was beautiful in a bathing suit that hugged dangerously attractive curves. That is, her body was beautiful. She had no head.

Chuck Reynolds snorted. The headless-woman show was an odd place for a meeting, but Ann had always liked odd places. This address was the one she'd given, and he'd repeated it after her. There could be no mistake.

He went into the dark areaway and peered through the glass. Dim light inside showed a short lobby with blistered wall paint. He tried the door, felt it swing away from him.

A table stood at one side. On it lay a few ticket rolls and some papers. A thick-bodied man in a red monkey jacket and fancy cap was counting the tickets. Hearing Reynolds' step, he lifted bright little eyes.

"I was supposed to meet a young woman here at seven thirty," Reynolds explained.

"Not here, soldier, you wasn't." The heavy man looked annoyed. "We don't

open till eight. And the show don't go on till nine."

"She gave this address," Reynolds insisted.

"All right, she gave this address. She was standing you up."

Reynolds shook his head.

"Then what's her name?"

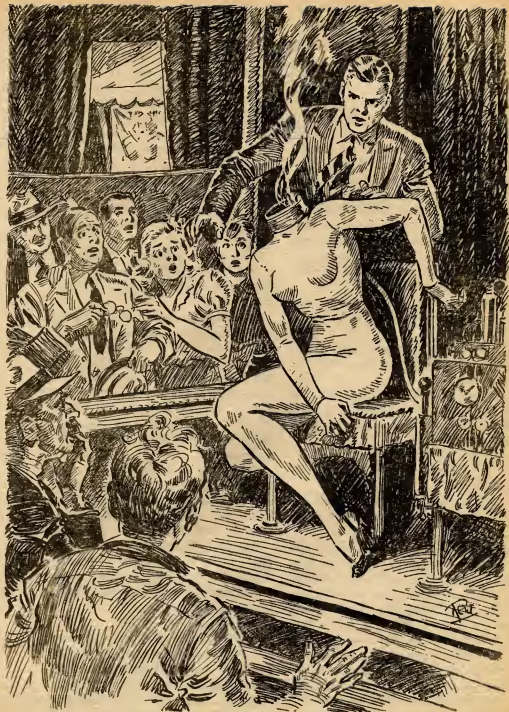
"Ann," Reynolds said. "Ann Reynolds."

"No gal by that name around here. Wanta know what I think? You're trying to crash the gate with a phony yarn."

"You're nuts!" Reynolds said in a tone between scorn and anger.

"Oh, a smart guy." The bad-tempered ticket man got up and circled the table. "You want a look at Adele, the headless woman, you can pay your way in. Later. With no dough off for the uniform." His voice crackled. "On your way, buddy!"

"I'm waiting right here," Reynolds insisted. The man in the monkey jacket brought out all the perversity Reynolds had, and now Reynolds wouldn't have taken money to leave. "If you're smarter than you look," he



Smoke curled up from the open collar . . . a woman screamed—

said, his voice dripping scorn, "and that wouldn't be very smart, you'll go back to counting tickets—an easier job than bouncing me."

Reynolds' lips had curled back, showing fine white teeth, and his eyes flashed signals which the ticket man missed.

Knuckles smashed into Reynolds' mouth, giving him the salty taste of his own blood. The room rocked, but he pumped four punches into the larger man's face. The attendant skidded away from him, came up short against the wall. His arms spread-eagled on it, helping his rubbery legs support him.

Reynolds' head cleared rapidly and, now that he had upheld his honor, his temper cleared too. He said quickly, "Like to make some money?"

The attendant stared stupidly, and then greed crawled into his eyes. "Hunh?"

"Two bucks," Reynolds said, "if you forget this trouble and pass me."

"Three?"

Reynolds was handing him the money when a door opened. A squat face peered out and a pair of ducks lips framed words:

"What goes on, Morrie?"

"I'm passing this soldier ahead of time, Lips."

Lips shrugged, swung the door wide. "You'll have a long wait, Sergeant."

REYNOLDS followed Lips, who wore a medical jacket, into a long, low room whose walls and ceilings, painted a dazzling white, made his eyes ache with reflected light. Empty chairs curved between the door and a long screen about eight feet high.

Lips went behind the screen and Reynolds trailed along, passing an array of coils and tanks on a low stage.

Lips said, "You don't belong in this section, Sergeant. Take a chair out front."

Reynolds turned away. He'd hoped that Ann was waiting for him behind the screen, though he couldn't imagine why she should be.

He was vaguely annoyed. "Chuck, dear, I haven't forgotten . . . anything," she'd murmured when she phoned him at the hotel where he was spending his furlough. "Not anything, sweet. I want to see you again, perhaps start over."

The simple words had stirred the old passions, but only for a moment. "After the mess you made of my life," Reynolds had said, "I don't want to see *you* again."

"Please"—tremulously, pleadingly.

"All right," he'd told her then. "If it means so much to you, I'll meet you. But that's all."

There had been two girls. Reynolds had married the wrong one—and lost both. Ann had left him six months after the wedding, and until today he'd had no idea where she might be. Ruth, no tramp, was still in love with him, but she had scruples about divorce, foolish scruples, and as long as Ann and Reynolds both lived she would consider them married.

If he were married to Ruth, he could anticipate a normal life when the abnormal creatures of the world were wiped out. But that was the sort of thinking that always made him glum.

Ann wanted another chance. "Chuck, dear . . ." Yes, of course. Because she needed something, possibly money from his investments, and expected him to give it to her.

A REAR door slammed. Hearing no footsteps, he decided that Lips had gone out. He'd been an engineer in civilian life, with an absorbing interest in things mechanical, and now he moved toward the stage again for a closer look at the electrical gadgets.

The motors were supposed to operate pumps feeding three compressed-air chambers equipped with gauges. They were convincing enough, but the chair on the platform made the whole arrangement look like a fake—aside from the fact that if the headless woman were kept alive artificially, she'd have to be in the chair all the time, show or no show.

Tubes ran to a half-moon collar obviously designed for a normal girl's throat instead of a headless neck. The performer could tilt her head back and let it rest on a cushioned platform behind the chair. Two perfectly polished mirrors, their edges joining to form an all but invisible vertical line in front of the head rest, would block off an audience view of the performer's head. And yet the rubber collar, apparently attached to a neck stump, would be visible.

Success of the trick depended on the room's side walls, whose glaring white was reflected toward the audience by the mirrors. Anyone looking at the "headless woman" from the front would mistake the white glare of the mirrors for part of the rear wall. The machines, of course, were only stage props.

Reynolds returned to the section out front. People were straggling in now, but the slam of the rear door lifted above crowd noises. Lips was probably coming back with the girl who would pretend to be the headless woman. She'd sit in her chair and Lips would turn on the motors and slide back the screen.

The motors throbbed softly a moment later and high-tension electricity crackled erratically in long tubes. Ann still hadn't shown up. If she hadn't meant to come, why had she called?

An oily-skinned man with a tricky waxed mustache sat next to Reynolds.

"Smell what I smell?" he asked.

Reynolds nodded. What he smelled himself wasn't ozone or hot bearing oil, or even scorched insulation; it was more offensive, not unlike the stench of burning pig bristles. But of course there weren't any pigs.

The oily-skinned man was jumpy. "I've seen this show lots of times. And I know there ain't supposed to be any stink. Something's wrong."

Reynolds agreed, silently, that there was something wrong, but believed that it concerned the oily-skinned man. Certainly the guy wasn't level-headed.

The stranger got up and went to the screen. As he stood there, watching whatever was behind the screen, muscles bunched along his jaw line and his eyes bugged.

Reynolds, curious now, went forward with a few others, disregarding an usher's yells. Lips, behind the screen, cursed and threw a switch. The motors died and electricity stopped crackling.

REYNOLDS saw a girl in the chair. She wore a veil dancer's costume that hid even less than the bathing suit in the poster. Her well-moulded legs were crossed and her arms hung loose. She was oddly motionless, and wisps of smoke drifted from the rubber throat collar.

Reynolds recoiled. It was monstrous, incredible. And yet his numbed senses had to accept the evidence. The odor was caused by seared flesh!

He peered across the mirrors in front of the head rest. His legs went watery and hot bursts of blood shot into his head. The girl sitting there, part of her lovely face blackened, was Ann!

Lips had come over and was snarling to the oily-skinned man: "Might've known you'd gum up the show, Haley,

the way you hate Duke. But this time you went too far."

Haley mopped his face. When he spoke, Reynolds got a shock.

"Look, Lips," Haley husked. "Duke Winter has still got that offer posted outside. 'One thousand dollars' reward for proof the headless woman is not alive,' the sign says. And I'm claiming it, 'cause Adele is dead."

"Rat!" Lips ground out. "A dame you were nuts about, and you talk about collecting dough on her death!"

Someone shouted for a doctor; a woman screamed. Reynolds stood mute.

What sort of ghastly trick had Ann played on him this time? If she had wanted to committ suicide by electrocution, why in heaven's name would she want him present?

HE WAS still standing there, half dazed, when the police arrived; and then Morrie, the ticket taker in the monkey jacket, led a beefy, solid-looking man to him.

"That's him," Morrie said. "He asked for a dame named Ann, when we never had any Ann in the show. Maybe he meant Adele, hunh?"

The stranger gave Reynolds a hard-eyed look and flashed a shield. "Captain Hansen, Homicide," he said flatly. "This is murder, judging by the way someone fixed up the wiring so juice'd run through the lady's neck and back into the circuit."

Abruptly he shifted into a routine-question attack, which Reynolds met without volunteering any information.

"So you're an engineer by trade?"

"That's what I said," Reynolds told him resentfully.

"Then," said Captain Hansen, "you would have been able to understand a layout like this after a couple of quick looks. Mind you, I don't say you're

our man, but you *could* have bared the wires with a knife and worked them through the rubber collar in two minutes."

"Yes, if I'd had a chance," Reynolds said, and instantly regretted it.

"It's up to us to decide if you had a chance," Hansen said.

Reynolds, badly shaken by Ann's death, and frankly scared, blurted out, "Anyway, why should I kill my former—" and then checked himself, too late to cover the blunder.

"Your former what?" Hansen asked softly, pursing his lips.

"Wife. But don't— Hell, I didn't know she was here."

Captain Hansen shook his massive head. "I'm supposed to believe that, after what the man said about you trying to get in early to meet a woman?"

"How did I know she was with the show? She phoned me, asked me to meet her here at seven thirty."

Hansen said nothing, but clearly he wasn't convinced.

"And of course," Reynolds said sarcastically, "I would have stood up there, in front of a hundred people, if I had known she was in the chair."

"You might have," Hansen said tonelessly. "Let's see your knife. I'll want to have any particles on the blade analyzed."

"I don't have a knife."

Hansen searched him expertly. "Not here. If you ditched it around here, we may find it. And I don't have to tell you what we'd think if there were traces of rubber on the edge and your fingerprints on the handle. . . . Wait here. I'll be back in a minute."

Reynolds sat down, though he wanted to punch the captain's fat head. Hansen went from witness to witness, blustering, threatening. His methods were crude but, Reynolds conceded, effective. In a short time he had finished the pre-

liminary questioning and was coming back.

A flash bulb went off almost in Reynolds' face, and Captain Hansen said, "No more pix for you newshounds." And to Reynolds: "Guy named Haley says he heard you went behind the screen before the show."

"Maybe Haley's covering himself."

Hansen nodded. "We're not dumb enough to overlook that possibility, and he'll be held as a material witness."

A DISHEVELED young man, wild-eyed, with a bitter mouth in an otherwise handsome face, swept past Reynolds, pushed the medical examiner aside and stood over the victim. His fingers worked in his palms and his compressed lips framed silent curses. He dropped to his knees and impulsively cushioned Ann's head on one arm. His body heaved and dry sobs sounded in his throat.

"Who's the screwball?" Captain Hansen asked Reynolds.

"I don't know anyone here," Reynolds answered.

"I'll find out. Come along."

Reynolds went with Hansen to the distraught man's side.

Hansen said brutally, "Well?"

The man straightened. "I'm Harry Winter, manager of this outfit. And she is—was going to be my wife."

The information jarred Reynolds.

"Where were you, Mr. Winter?"

"Giving dictation, over at my hotel. Miss Sandra Drake, my secretary, was taking it." He spoke with an effort. "Miss Drake," he called without raising his voice much.

A girl, svelte in fur, came over, dabbing at round, liquid eyes. She was the lingerie-model type—platinum hair, baby face, voluptuous curves. In a low voice she verified Winter's statement.

Haley, escorted by a policeman,

joined the group. "Duke, I'm sure sorry," he said.

"You're sorry?" Winter shot back. "That's easy to believe, isn't it?—when you try to collect a thousand bucks for saying she's dead. Adele would never have anything to do with scum like you, and you were sorehead enough to—"

"Adele?" It was Hansen's voice cutting in. "This man, Mr. Reynolds, says her name was Ann."

Winter said, "That's right. We changed it to Adele for show purposes."

Hansen's eyes glinted in a way Reynolds didn't like. Reynolds could feel circumstantial evidence tightening around him, though it didn't seem that he was the only suspect.

"We'll have to book you, Reynolds."

Reynolds thought swiftly. In jail he'd have no chance to help himself. Free, he might follow some clues. Having a personal stake—a double stake, counting a possible future with Ruth—he would not be hampered by belief in the guilt of a guy named Reynolds.

He backed away, caught an eye-tail view of a man who looked like a detective, closing in from the side. Reynolds' army-trained muscles went taut.

He snatched up a chair and swung it, and the detective side-stepped, whisking out a revolver. Then the chair swung back in the opposite direction, hit the revolver and sent it skidding along the floor. Reynolds dropped the chair and went into a scraping dive for the gun. His hand closed on it.

The revolver, a .32, stopped the detective and Hansen in their tracks, and Reynolds backed out the alley door. The cop stationed there was slow in unlimbering his sap, and Reynolds slapped him across the wrist with the barrel, bringing a yelp of rage and pain.

A STIFF wind screeched out of the north. It struck through his

sweat-soaked clothes, chilled him. He hadn't had time to grab his overcoat.

Whistles shrilled. The bright finger of an electric torch slanted through the alley, pushing his shadow far ahead.

Something tugged at his flapping trousers and he heard the angry smash of a revolver. They were trying to shoot a leg out from under him, and he had a waking nightmare of a ruined army career. But he kept going, weaving and changing pace like a backfield runner. Blood in his temples gave him a light-headed feeling, and his breathing was labored. He flung his aching body around a corner.

There were parked cars, but only one had a man at its wheel. He sprinted again and, scrambling into that car, rapped out an order to get moving. The driver, who'd probably been waiting for someone, went pale.

The starter whirled, caught. Rubber squealed and gears whined. Sirens wailed in the neighborhood, but Reynolds had shaken his panic. How this would turn out he didn't know; right now he was free.

"Thanks, fella," he said, a little later. "Now, your overcoat. Your car heater will keep you warm. Oh, yes, and your calling card, so I can send the coat back to you."

The car went away, fast. Reynolds walked briskly to a rundown house with a sign advertising rooms. A slatternly woman came to the door and, after accepting a dollar for the night, showed him to a smelly room and went away. Reynolds sat down and put his chin in his hands.

Suicide, he thought, could be ruled out at once. It implied a type of insanity that Ann had never shown.

His eyes were glittering slits in his narrow, intelligent face and his nostrils quivered as he considered the oily-skinned man, Haley, who had tried to

throw suspicion on him. But if Haley had planned Ann's death and the frame-up, he had slipped out of character in openly claiming the "reward" and putting the finger on Reynolds. No, the mind of this killer would be consistently devious.

How about Lips? Had he left the room to make it seem that Reynolds had *opportunity* to change the wiring? Reynolds' pulses raced and he sat bolt upright. He might be on a real lead now; that sort of trick would fit any man who preferred an elaborate murder method to a simple one. . . .

IT WAS after midnight when Reynolds left the rooming house. On impulse he strolled past the headless-woman showhouse. There was no police guard, no light; nothing to focus attention on the place.

When questioned, Lips had given the Hotel Bismarck as his address. The least Reynolds could do was to call on Lips and beat a little truth out of him. Charges were piling up against Reynolds anyway; one more would make little difference.

The Bismarck was a down-at-the-eaves building with a lobby that had been converted into a bar. A newsboy went out as Reynolds came in. Inside, the only person in sight was a kegbellied bartender.

"I'm looking for a man called Lips something-or-other."

The barman's eyes studied him briefly, flicked to a folded-down newspaper on the bar. "His room's upstairs. Rear, on the right."

Worn steps led to a narrow hall with unused gas jets in cracked walls. Reynolds found the door, rapped sharply.

There was no response, but light showed under the door. He peered through the keyhole for a crescent view

of one corner of the bed. Hanging motionless over the edge of the bed was a man's leg in trouser cloth, a heavy shoe on the foot.

Reynolds tried the door and was almost sorry it opened. He stopped short, staring. It was Lips who lay on the bed, fully dressed, head twisted back. There was blood, and it had come from Lips' slashed throat. But the weapon which had been used wasn't in sight.

Reynolds was numb with new horror. Cold sweat broke out on his brow and his breath caught, and it was several seconds later when he edged jerkily out of the room.

It was then the full implication of this murder hit him. The barman would give the police a description of him. And Lips's finish would be pinned on him, too.

A fire-escape door led him to an enclosed stairway. The door jamb was splintered and the loose wood was white and dry. The killer had apparently jimmied his way in, but the police might reason that Reynolds had marred the wood himself to give them a red-herring clue.

And then he thought of something else. The already hardening blood was proof that Lips had been killed before Reynolds appeared. If Reynolds reported to the barman right now, before the exact time of his arrival became obscured, possibly he could beat at least this one charge.

His mind was clear, but waves of nausea kept breaking inside him as he went stiffly to the stairhead.

A creaking stair drove him into shadow just before a policeman's blocky shoulders rose into view. The cop's face was grim; so was the revolver in his hand.

Reynolds leaped, slashed downward with the .32. It hit one blue-clad shoulder and the cop's gun bounced

down the stairway. Reynold's free hand blurred in swift motion, snared cloth and jerked the cop forward on his face.

Going out, Reynolds had a glimpse of the barman, pasty-faced; of the newspaper, now spread on the bar. There was a scarehead about the death of the headless woman, a story bizarre enough to supersede war news, and under it the flashbulb picture of Reynolds. Evidently the barman had called the beat cop after recognizing Reynolds.

OUTSIDE, snow came down in gusty sheets. A cab's light winked down the street and Reynolds ran to the curb. A few seconds later he leaped into the tonneau.

The cab went skidding along the street. Reynolds looked back and saw the cop and the barman emerge from the Bismarck just as the driver whipped around a corner. Reynolds sighed and leaned back, trying to concentrate on the shapeless pieces of the murder puzzle. Abruptly he snapped his fingers. There was only one answer, an answer so simple he should have sensed it immediately.

He dismissed the cab a half block from the headless-woman showhouse, found a tire iron in a parked car and levered open the alley door of the building.

Once inside, he closed the door and struck a match. It flared weirdly, throwing light on the door behind the chair with the trick mirrors.

More matches, struck on the other side of that door, showed chairs strewn about. He sat down in one near the front entrance and let his last match die.

Hours passed while memories marched across his mind, and then pale sunlight streaked into the building. Soon he'd stake his freedom, maybe

his life, on the strength of a single theory. If he were wrong, he'd never return to the army, never marry Ruth. He hesitated on the thought of marriage, because he knew he ought to be grieving. But he couldn't grieve over Ann.

At nine o'clock a key scraped in the front lock. Reynolds carried his revolver toward the sound.

Feet rapped hollowly in the hall.

"You can't go on with the show today," said a woman's voice, soft, resonant.

A man snorted. "Of course I can. The chumps will pack this place to see a murder scene, even if they know the show's a fake."

If Reynolds hadn't been certain that the manager would show up, either to clear everything out or to arrange it for another performance, he wouldn't have waited through part of the night. His moment had come.

Duke Winter, show manager and Ann's boy-friend, appeared, his dark eyes furtive. Behind him, slinky and svelte, carrying a bag, was his secretary, Sandra Drake.

Reynolds stepped out, letting the revolver dangle at arm's length. Winter ripped out curses and swung from the hip. Reynolds blocked the swing and raked Winter's abdomen with the revolver muzzle. Winter's eyes bulged and he screamed, and then he sat down hard.

Sandra gave a little cry and squatted at Winter's side, showing plenty of silk. She held him tight and feverishly stroked his hair.

"Duke, Duke!" she wailed. "Are—you are you all right?"

Winter's handsome face had corpse grayness, but his eyes were alive with hatred. He crawled away from Reynolds; then, with Sandra's help, got to his feet.

"Well, mister," Winter said, "this will make things tougher for you. Damn killer!"

REYNOLDS appraised them both without answering. He believed that Duke Winter, for all his sissy looks, was hard and wouldn't break. Sandra was hard, too, but she had a streak of unsimulated emotionalism which might turn into hysteria. Reynolds spoke to her:

"Only two persons connected with the show knew that Adele wasn't the name of the headless woman. You two. The affair between Ann and Winter gave her a hold on him, and he couldn't very well marry you and expect her to keep peace. You'd been around Ann long enough to know how she talked, and when you called me yesterday, you posed as her."

Sandra's voice was edged when she asked, "And why would I do that?"

"To get me on the scene at the right time and show how I *could* have killed Ann, letting a possible motive suggest itself to the police. Knowing about me from talks with Ann, Winter must have realized what I think of a promise; must have known I'd show up if I promised to. My background as an engineer and Ann's husband would make me the best person to frame, though you'd never met me. Very elaborate, but you're both going to fry for killing Ann and Lips."

Winter and Sandra showed surprise, which didn't seem genuine, and Sandra blurted out, "I didn't—"

Reynolds grinned at her. "Lips knew something was wrong when Winter called him away from the trick chair before the show, or maybe he saw Winter wiring the chair. He may have tried blackmail, and you had to silence him."

"Yeah?" Winter put in sourly.

"How could I be sure the guy at the gate would pass you?"

"You'd have got me past him, all right. But it wasn't necessary."

"Duke would be an awful dummy," Sandra said, "not to think of the money he might have to pay when Ann could be proved dead."

Reynolds' lips flattened in a grimace. "He figured the police would reason like that. Better to pay a grand if necessary, and not risk prosecution."

"You sure are funny, mister," Sandra said, her voice not quite normal. "Your own fix is worse than ours. You've got a crazy story based on not one shred of real evidence. Do you hear me? Not one shred!"

"Have I?" Reynolds inquired. "There are two of you, only one of me. That means I won't get crossed up in the story I tell. When the cops begin to work on you, in separate rooms, after hearing what I have to say, they'll find little discrepancies in your stories, and then you'll both be almost ready to keep the hell fires burning. The three of us are going to the nearest police station right now."

Sandra cracked. "Duke," she cried, "we can't take the chance! We *can't*!"

She swung her handbag at Reynolds. Winter launched himself in a low tackle at the same time. The bag hit Reynolds' gun, jerking it out of his hand, but Winter missed his tackle and came up hard against the wall.

"Hold it, all of you!" said a voice from the doorway.

It was the cop Reynolds had slugged at the Hotel Bismarck, and his revolver was pointed at Winter and Sandra. He scooped up the .32.

"You gave me a helluva wallop," the cop said to Reynolds. His voice was neutral, neither friendly nor hostile, though Reynolds would have expected hostility. "I heard most of the

talk here and I'm stringing along with you. Scum, that's what these two are."

"What brought you?" Reynolds asked.

"To square myself for not calling help to catch you, I ran down the cabby you hired and he said he dropped you near here. In the alley I saw the jimmed door and footprints in the snow, all pointed at the building. But I didn't want to warn you by forcing the door, so I blocked it with a plank and went around to the front, where there weren't any prints, proving you were still inside, and waited awhile. Then these two came along and I got out of sight until they were in, and then I came in, too."

Sandra was crying and Winter, on his feet again, was loudly proclaiming innocence. Reynolds whirled on him, bringing up a short uppercut which cracked against his jaw. The show manager's arms flopped loosely and he pitched forward, out cold.

"Sorry to mess up your prisoner," Reynolds said to the cop, "but I owed him that."



"I want you to meet secret agent X-5!"

MURDER



Dusty leaped into motion, began a race down the slope . . . a shot rang out crisply as he ran on

Dusty Haven had one passenger on his bus that he didn't want to carry. His name was Death, and funny, he had a ticket, too!

ENROUTE

by **C. S. WALLACE**

CHAPTER I

Death in the Snow

THE FIRST intimation of trouble came when the superintendent of highway maintenance flagged Dusty Haven at the Summit to relay a message phoned from below that a passenger had been left behind. The superintendent was feeling the strain of winter.

"Look, flathead," he shouted as he came up to the driver's window.

"Haven't you learned to count yet?"

"What do you mean?" Dusty queried.

"You left a passenger at Truckee."

Dusty glanced over his load. "I checked out of there okay."

"That isn't what Truckee says." The superintendent's temper frayed easily when winter storms kept his crews on the jump. "You better learn to count or maybe you need some more fingers."

Dusty turned in his seat to look at his passengers. "Anybody whose ticket I didn't get?"



Milburn

No one spoke up.

"Better check 'em, lunkhead. Someone is putting one over."

Dusty sighed. He had a full load but mostly shorts. Young people going up to one of the ski clubs for a party. They were a hilarious crowd and if one of 'em was trying to get by without a ticket or to hang on to it and turn it in later for a refund he would have a hard time catching it without a lot of time. They would pass the stubs among themselves as fast as he checked them so it would be almost impossible to get an accurate check. However with the superintendent looking on he'd better make an attempt just for the record.

While he checked tickets the superintendent stood at the window making wisecracks, at Dusty's expense and for the benefit of a couple of giggling girls. The load checked down to a whiskered old fellow sitting on the last seat alongside a fuzzy blond. He stood up and began to go hurriedly through his pockets.

"I bought a ticket," he mumbled. "I got on at Lovelock."

He's had a ticket too, Dusty remembered. He'd been on the bus when Dusty took over at Reno. He'd got off to buy a bottle of liquor and Dusty had warned him about drinking on the bus. He warned him again now.

"I told you I would put you off the bus if I caught you drinking. I mean it. I'll put you off right in the snow."

"I ain't been drinking, mister," the old fellow said. "Not on the bus. I ain't had a drink since we left Reno."

Dusty stared at him suspiciously. He had an idea that both he and the blond were taking nips right along. Both were well lit but they hadn't created any disturbance as yet.

"If you get sick," he growled, "off you go right in the snow."

HE GOT back behind the wheel and picked up his waybill. He had thirty-eight passengers and thirty-eight tickets. Whoever made the beef at Truckee must have missed the bus. He'd warned all his passengers not to get off there as it wasn't a rest stop.

"Well," the superintendent said.

"I check," Dusty said and put the bus in gear and started down the hill.

At the ski club he dropped most of his passengers. Just an even dozen now and one of these, a bartender, got off at the next stop which was a tavern.

It had started snowing again. Big, soft flakes that would have the highway covered feet deep before morning and keep the snow plows going all night. He was in second gear and dropped to third as he started around a curve. This saved him from a nasty crack-up when the bus ploughed through a deep drift to hit something solid.

The jar shook Dusty's hands from the wheel and put most of his passenger in the aisle.

"Anybody hurt?" Dusty called, as he put on the brakes and climbed from behind the wheel.

There was a shaking of heads and a chorus of voices asking, "What happened?"

"Hit something," Dusty explained. "Just stay in the bus and I will see what it is."

It was a giant sugar pine and lay across the highway blocking all traffic. It had slid down the side of the mountain carrying snow and debris with it, and couldn't have happened so very long ago for the snow plow had been along only recently. It meant they would be stuck here for sometime, possibly until the highway patrol came along on its next inspection trip. Dusty climbed back into the bus to break the bad news.

"What are we going to do?" several

wailed disconsolately. You would think that if they didn't get to where they were going exactly when they were supposed to something terrible would happen.

"Just relax," Dusty advised. "It is all we can do until the highway is cleared."

"When will that be?"

"As soon as the highway maintenance crew finds out the road is blocked and can get their equipment here."

"Can't you let them know?"

"How?"

"By telephone."

"The nearest telephone I know of is at least five miles from here and the way the snow is falling you couldn't get half way there without snow shoes."

"Can't you turn around and go back?"

"Not on this highway," Dusty glanced out of the window. "I'll be lucky if I can back up enough to give the road crew room to work." He climbed out of the bus again to examine the road carefully. He'd better get out of the way right now before the snow made it impossible.

"I'll give you a hand," the sailor occupying the seat right in back of him called cheerily. He put on his pea-coat and watch cap and came outside.

DUSTY was glad of his offer. Backing up far enough and yet not too far was going to be a ticklish job. He'd have to get over to the left side of the highway to give the snow plow room enough to pass and the bus could easily drop off the left side of the road into the river several hundred feet below. He stationed the sailor at the edge of the road as a marker and backed the bus up to him. As he did so he thought he heard a crunching sound as if he had backed into something.

"Hit anything?" he called to the sailor.

"Couldn't tell if you did," the sailor said. "Not with all this snow. It covers everything."

"I've got to be at work in the morning," a girl spoke up as Dusty and the sailor got back in the bus.

Dusty grinned at her. "You'll be there in plenty of time."

"Good heavens!" another passenger spoke up. "It isn't going to take us all night to get to San Francisco, is it?"

Dusty shook his head. "Likely to be a private car along any minute. It can turn around and take the news back to the Summit."

"Suppose one doesn't come along?"

"The highway patrol comes along about every four hours."

"Four hours?"

"And dispatchers will be tracing this schedule as soon as it fails to show up on time."

"If I had known this was going to happen. I would have taken the train."

"Trains get caught in slides too."

The lady glanced out of the window. "In a few minutes it is going to be so dark we can't see a thing."

"There is nothing to see except snow," Dusty said.

"It is beautiful in the summer time. I have friends who own a cabin up here."

Dusty decided he could use his time profitably in making out an accident report. That was always a headache. No matter how much information you put down the superintendent always wanted more and if he didn't the general office did. He passed witness cards out to everyone, requesting them to fill them out and sign them. He noticed with a twinge that there were just thirteen persons in the bus. Eleven passengers, a babe in arms and himself.

"I think this bus is getting cold," the

lady with the baby said.

"So do I," others remarked.

Dusty glanced at the dial. It was up to 200.

"It certainly is cold," the lady who wanted to take the train said emphatically.

Dusty took another look at the instrument board, put aside his work and went outside. Something was wrong.

HE FOUND a big boulder had played havoc with his engine. That was what the crunching sound had been. He'd backed into it. He kicked away enough snow to discover that he wasn't going to be able to move without the services of a mechanic or a tow-car. Evidently this wasn't his lucky night. First a mess-up in his load and now this. No chance of reporting it unless someone came along the highway, an occurrence growing less likely every minute. Travel wasn't what it used to be and was still worse at night.

He walked down past the barricade made by the tree and saw tire tracks. A car, coming up the hill, had reached the obstruction, turned around and gone back. It must have happened just before they came into sight, otherwise the falling snow would have covered up the tracks by now.

No doubt the car would report the blockade but it would depend entirely to whom the report was made as to what was done. Traffic up the hill would be warned and quite possibly the highway department notified to halt traffic coming from the other direction, but would anybody think of the bus schedule? The dispatcher at Sacramento wouldn't begin to fret about it for another hour or so at the least. He had too many other schedules to worry about. Unless some impatient traveller

along the line made a complaint and the commission agent was interested enough to wonder, they might be the forgotten people of the night.

A phone call to the Summit would show that the bus had left there on time; and another to the next rest stop would prove that the bus had not yet arrived there, but in between those points there was nothing but flag stops, places where the bus stopped on when flagged or to let off passengers. If they were extremely lucky and the maintenance crew started out the minute they learned of the blockade it would still take him sometime to get to a telephone and get hold of a mechanic or a tow-car and take still longer for either of those to get to the scene. In the meantime the bus would get colder and colder and his passengers freeze into a hundred thousand dollar damage suit. And that would mean his job.

WHEN he got back into the bus he was met by a chorus of complaints.

"This bus is getting colder and colder. We're freezing."

Well, there were two ways of handling that. Telling 'em the truth straight out or put it off as long as possible. They would get wise in the end anyway.

"I'm sorry, but the engine is out of commission."

"You mean we can't have any heat?"

"That is the size of it."

"But we got to have heat. We'll freeze to death."

"If you have any more clothes in your suitcases I'll get them out of the baggage compartment."

"If we put on all the clothes we own it wouldn't be enough," the lady who spoke of taking the train snorted. She was a tall, well-dressed, competent appearing person. Dusty took a quick

look at the witness card she had signed and learned her name was Lydia Fallon.

"You'll have to do something about my baby," the lady with the baby said.

"You'll have to do something," Lydia snapped.

"Let's get some wood and build a fire," the old coot with the whiskers suggested.

Dusty looked to see if he had been drinking any more but he didn't appear any worse off. The blond at his side looked bleary-eyed.

"What would you make a fire out of?" the sailor queried.

Whiskers waved his arm about. "Plenty of wood."

"It is all wet," the sailor objected.

"It will burn once you get it going good."

"How are you going to get it going good?"

"If we dig down at the bottom of a tree we can find plenty of dry leaves."

Dusty decided he must be a prospector. Most likely been up in the hills all summer and was now going to the city for his annual spree.

"The snow is ten feet deep where those trees are," Dusty told him.

"Perhaps there is a cabin near," another man said. He was garbed the same as Whiskers in top boots and sheepskin-lined coat but was clean shaven and blue-eyes twinkled intelligently behind double lenses. If Whiskers was a prospector this fellow must be a mine owner, or he could be a stockman.

"I know where there is just the thing," Lydia Fallon said. "That is, if we are where I think we are."

"We would have to shovel an awful lot of snow to reach any cabin around here," Dusty warned.

"No, we wouldn't," Lydia said. "It is only a couple of hundred yards off

the highway and the highway people keep the road clear all the time."

Dusty looked skeptical.

"Yes, they do," Lydia stated. "A commissioner or somebody important has a cabin just beyond and they come up here for the winter sports."

The man with the glasses stood up and began putting on his heavy coat. "I think we had better try to locate it. We can't stay here and freeze."

Lydia Fallon looked at Dusty. "Have you got a flashlight? We will need it before we get back."

DUSTY got a flashlight from his toolbox, put on his overcoat and joined Lydia and the man. The name he had signed was Dale Rupert. Lydia had an expensive-looking fur overcoat and had tied a woolen muffler over her smart sport hat to cover her ears and tie under her chin. She wore galoshes over her shoes. The man who was riding with her put them on for her but made no attempt to go along which might be because of his clothes. They were plenty good but not made for heavy weather although like most dude cowboys he wore boots instead of shoes. His name, Dusty noted, was Cary Ryde.

He hadn't got on with Lydia at Reno but had caught the bus at the quarantine station. He had presented a railroad ticket and Dusty had made him buy a bus ticket at Truckee. Lydia had greeted him like an old friend and one of the ski party had moved to another seat to allow him to have the seat next to hers.

The snow on the highway was already inches deep. They plodded along quite a distance with Lydia searching closely for familiar signs.

"I'll know it the minute I see it," she explained. "The road turns off the highway into a little canyon and there

is a big tree that bends over like a man looking for something."

They came around the bend and halted. The road stretched before them for some distance.

"See it?" Dusty asked.

Lydia shook her head.

"We better try the other direction then."

They retraced their steps, passed the bus and the fallen tree to continue down the hill. They hadn't gone far when Lydia shouted. "I see it."

They turned off the highway into a little canyon and saw a cabin not far away. At the very end of the canyon was another cabin and the snow plow had gone down to it before turning around. Nice being a commissioner or something.

The cabin was built against the side of the mountain with the garages even with the highway and the living rooms above. It was boarded up tight but Lydia knew where the key was kept. Lydia, Dusty surmised, was the sort who take over people's houses and things and run 'em for them. He could almost hear her explaining. "Well, you can't let people sit in a cold bus and freeze to death."

"Here, here," she called to Dusty when he started for the outside stairs. "Those don't mean anything. They're summer stairs." She opened one of the garages and pointed to a stair leading up on the inside. "Water doesn't drip all over you going up these stairs."

Upstairs was a good-sized living room with a fireplace at one end. Several doors opened off it leading to other rooms, kitchen and bedrooms. Dusty brought up arm loads of wood and Rupert made a fire. Lydia rummaged about and found a gasoline lantern.

"You'll need it to bring the others up," she explained. "Mr. er-er and I will get everything cozy for them. The

fire will be enough light for us."

Rupert looked surprised and Dusty wondered if Lydia was arranging things deliberately and if the other guy, Ryde would approve.

DUSTY took the lantern and started back. It was dark now with the snow getting deeper every minute. In another hour they would need snowshoes to go tramping about. He wondered if there was a pair in the cabin and if he could use them. It might be necessary to look for help before the night was over.

"Okay," he told his passengers when he got back to the bus. "We've found a cabin. Get your things together and we will go up there."

He started to help the lady with the baby but found Whiskers ahead of him. Dusty grabbed the old fellow's arm and steered him to the front of the bus. "Look, old timer," he began diplomatically. "You look like you were used to this sort of weather."

"Sure am, bud," Whiskers said. "Been all over these hills in all sorts of weather."

"Well, suppose you go ahead and break a path and let one of these tenderfeet help with the baby."

"All right, bud, if you say so." He ploughed ahead with a steadiness that surprised Dusty considering the strength of his breath.

Dusty handed the lantern to the sailor and asked him to light the way. "Just go around the obstruction and turn off the highway into the first little canyon you come to."

"Aye, aye, sir," the sailor said cheerfully. He seemed to think this was a lark.

A couple of other men were helping the lady with the baby by now. As they trooped out of the bus and started along the path, Whiskers was enthu-

siastically kicking clear for them, it brought to mind a picture he had seen in one of the magazines. Russian refugees fleeing before Hitler, carrying all their belongings. Dusty stopped the last man with a request for a hand in carrying some baggage.

His name was Harry Kyburz and he had the coldest, steel-blue eyes that Dusty had ever seen. There wasn't the slightest expression to his face. His cold scrutiny startled Dusty and set him to wondering where he had seen the fellow before. He never said a word but stood waiting for Dusty to hand him the baggage, and when Dusty handed him a suitcase he glanced toward the rear of the bus and said, "What's the matter with the frail?"

"What do you mean?" Dusty asked startled.

The man jerked his head toward the rear of the bus. "The female there. Why didn't she go with the rest?"

Dusty followed his glance and could just make out a pair of legs. "Damnation! I never knew it to fail. Let someone on with a bottle and you have trouble."

"Stewed?"

"Yeh. Whiskers, that guy Varney, must have got her soused. He is half-seas over himself."

"Is there a law against drinking in the bus?"

"A law and a lot of regulations."

"What difference does it make as long as they don't kick up a fuss?"

"They get sick when you start taking the turns and heave all over the car. It makes the rest of the passengers sick. You can't possibly ventilate the smell out. I should have dropped them off at Truckee only they were all right then."

"What will you do with her?"

"We'll have to carry her up to the cabin. She will freeze to death here."

DUSTY put the suitcases back in the baggage rack. "I'll come back for them later if you will give me a hand with the woman." He took hold of the woman's arm and pulled her upright. There didn't seem to be any more life to her than to a rag doll. "Come on, wake up. You can't stay here. You will freeze to death," he pleaded.

He tried to stand her up but her feet slid along the floor and he had to let her down again. "I guess we will have to carry her. A nice mess." He looked up to see Kyburz staring at him coldly.

"What's the matter?" Dusty was impelled to ask.

"That woman is dead."

"She can't be," Dusty argued without thinking.

"She is dead all right. Take a look at her."

Dusty tried to locate her pulse but couldn't find it. He felt her heart. "I can't feel it beating."

The woman's purse lay on the seat. Kyburz picked it up, rummaged in it till he found a mirror and held it to the woman's mouth. "See, no breath."

Dusty looked around wildly. "I wonder if we ought to try artificial respiration?"

Kyburz shook his head. "You can't do anything for that jane. She is completely dead."

"What'll I do?"

"Let her lay."

"But we can't do that. We'll have to take her up to the cabin."

"What good will that do?"

"But I can't just let her lay here."

"Why not? She is just as well off here as anywhere."

Dusty started to pull at his hair, knocked his cap off and had to scramble among the seats for it. Kyburz stretched the woman out on the back seat and turned away.

"Hadn't we ought to put something over the face anyway?" Dusty asked.

"She can't see anything," Kyburz retorted coldly.

"I wonder what killed her?" Dusty moaned.

Kyburz pointed to a flask lying on the seat. "Booze."

Dusty picked up the flask and read the label. "Old Atlas. Isn't that one of the very expensive liquors?"

"The most expensive there is."

"Funny Varney would buy it. I took him to a be prospector just in from the hills. Perhaps he found a mine."

"He'd never get by Reno till the leeches there wrung him dry. He wouldn't be taking a bus trip. He'd be lying in some alley doped or dead."

"I wonder if she bought it."

Kyburz shook his head. "She doesn't look any too prosperous. That is a \$9.75 outfit and the coat is rabbit. I'd judge she was a waitress or chambermaid."

"She might have picked up the bottle where she worked."

"That is possible especially if she was a chambermaid."

Dusty put the bottle in his pocket.

"What are you going to do with it?" Kyburz asked.

"Keep it to show the superintendent. No telling what he will want to know. I've seen whiskey do all sorts of things to people but this is the first time I've seen it kill anyone."

Kyburz stared at Dusty so long and coldly that Dusty began to wonder if the man knew something he wasn't telling.

"You'd better inventory her purse while you're at it," Kyburz said finally.

DUSTY examined the purse. There was lipstick, powder, perfume, handkerchiefs, keys, a pencil, eight

dollars in cash and a divorce certificate. Her name was Dolly Pomins.

"Celebrating," Kyburz commented. "That is what she was in Reno for."

"I wonder," Dusty began, "if Varney, that is the guy with the whiskers, knew she was dead."

"I doubt it. He seemed to be feeling quite happy."

"I wonder why he didn't try to get her to go along with him."

"He's got a one track mind. He was trying to play boy scout and help the woman with the baby."

Dusty thought, You don't miss much, do you? Aloud he said, "What a trip? I'll be making out reports from now until the fourth of July."

The trip to the cabin was getting harder to make. The snow was several inches deeper and still coming down. Dusty had an idea it would be deep enough to cover the bus by morning but hoped they wouldn't be stuck here that long. He was perspiring freely by the time they got there.

He found a cheerful fire burning in the big fireplace and his passengers settled down comfortably. The baby was asleep on a sofa with its mother in a chair and Lydia hovering about like an excited hen about to adopt a brood of ducks. Ryde watched Lydia sulkily while Rupert threw more wood on the fire. The sailor was trying to entertain a couple who didn't need entertaining with tales of the sea. They had been cuddling all the way from Reno and were still cuddling. Both were occupying one chair. Varney was nowhere in sight.

"Where is Varney?" Dusty asked as he put the baggage down.

Lydia looked up. "Who is he?"

Dusty made a motion to his chin.

"Oh, you mean the fellow with the whiskers. He is getting some more wood."

DUSTY found Varney in one of the garages. It was piled high with wood cut in lengths for the fireplace. He was trying to get some pieces out without letting a whole tier come tumbling down. A gasoline lantern was on the floor throwing circles of light but not high enough to show anything but the man's boots.

"Hey, you driver fellow," Varney called somewhat thickly. "Did you bring my girl friend with you?"

"Since when was she your girl friend?"

"Since Reno. I met her when she got on the bus."

"Where did you get on?"

"Lovelock."

"Where did you get the whiskey?"

"Reno."

"I suppose you offered her some of it?"

"Well, she said she had the willies. She just got a divorce. Her name is Dolly."

"What is her other name?"

"I don't know."

"Had she been drinking when she got on the bus?"

"I don't know. Maybe she'd had a couple of snorts."

"Do you know where she lives?"

"In San Francisco. She works at the Acme hotel."

"Huh!" Dusty grunted in surprise as he recalled that Kyburz had listed the Acme hotel as his residence. Could that be just a coincidence. "Where do you live?" he asked Varney.

"Me? I don't live no place."

"Are you a prospector?"

"No. I hunt herbs."

"Hunt herbs? I never heard of that."

"The Chinamen use them for medicine."

"I see. Ginseng and all that stuff."

"Don't find much ginseng. Wish I could. Chinks pay good for that."

"Where are you going now?"

"Oregon. Too dang much snow to find anything in Nevada."

"You're going to stop off and visit Dolly, I suppose."

"Yep. Dolly's a dang nice girl. Had a lot of trouble. No good husband."

"What does her husband do?"

"Drives a taxicab. He's a mean cuss. Beats her up." He rambled along about Dolly's marital affairs either because the liquor had made him mellow or because he was naturally talkative. Perhaps spending so much time alone sent him on a talking spree when he hit civilization.

Dusty paid little attention. He was wondering if it wouldn't be a good idea to get the old fellow to stop over and talk to the superintendent. It might save a lot of work in making out an accident report. Reporting a death, especially from drinking, wasn't going to make that job any easier. The super would want to know why he let them on in the first place.

"Is Dolly upstairs?" the old fellow asked suddenly.

"No. I left her in the bus."

Varney stopped work on the wood pile. "I'll go get her."

"No. You stay here. Dolly is in no condition to move."

"Is she drunk?"

"She's something."

"She'll freeze to death in the bus."

"No she won't. I've fixed her up. Don't you bother her."

VARNEY got an armful of wood and started upstairs. Dusty picked up the lantern to light the way. There seemed to be no electricity. Lanterns furnished all the light.

Lydia Fallon beckoned to Dusty the minute he got inside the door.

"Here is another little chore for you. This lady hasn't any more dry diapers

for the baby."

Dusty pointed to the suitcases he had lugged up from the bus. "I brought all her stuff up."

"She has used up all her spares already."

"Well, I haven't got any."

"You better take care of these then."

She indicated a pile of squares lying on a chair.

Dusty frowned. "Why don't you put 'em in front of the fire? They will dry there."

"That is just like a man. They have to be washed first."

"Washed?"

"Exactly. You can't put dirty diapers on a baby."

"You don't mean you want me to wash them?"

"Why not? Men every bit as handsome as you do that little thing. After they are married, of course. You will find a place down in one of the garages, or you might try the kitchen."

"I've never washed diapers in my whole life."

"Now is a good time to learn."

"Now look—"

"Go on. Someone has to do it."

"That isn't part of my job, lady."

"No. Your job is to get us stalled in the snow so we have to seek shelter here in the wilderness."

"I didn't cause that tree to fall across the highway."

"You backed the bus into a rock so we had to come here or freeze."

"That was an accident. I couldn't see the rock. It might happen to anyone."

"This is an accident"—she pointed to the diapers—"and might happen to anyone."

"Now look—"

"You're supposed to look after the safety and comfort of your passengers."

"I'm doing everything I can."

"No, you're not. You're letting a poor little innocent baby go wet. What if it catches cold and dies?"

"Women with babies ought to carry spares."

"They do," Lydia was adamant. "There is plenty to take her all the way to San Francisco if you hadn't fallen down on the job."

"Oh, all right," Dusty groaned. He took off his coat, hung it on the back of a chair and picked up the diapers.

"Don't use any soap on them."

"No soap?"

"No soap, if you don't get it all out it will chafe the baby's skin."

"But how am I going to get 'em clean without soap?"

The baby's mother spoke up. "You can put a little soap on if you will rinse them thoroughly after. Rinse them three or four times at least."

Dusty left, slamming the door behind him. He stumbled around trying to locate the kitchen and had to go back for the lantern. They didn't need it in the living room anyway. The fire lit that up enough.

He started a fire in the kitchen stove. It was an old-fashioned wood-burner, and put on the teakettle. He tossed the diapers in the sink and sat down to enjoy a smoke while waiting for the water to get hot. This was, he thought, going to be one hell of a trip from start to finish.

WHEN the teakettle began to sing he took it off and started to pour the water on the diapers. He saw right away that that wasn't going to work. He had to stop the drain or lose all the water. He put the teakettle back on the stove and looked about for a plug.

He couldn't find a plug but he did find a big pan. He put the diapers in that and poured the hot water over them. He found the soap and rolled up his

sleeves. Just about that time Lydia came in.

"Here, here," she shouted. "You can't do that."

"Can't do what?"

"Can't wash those diapers in the dishpan."

"Why not?"

"Tch! tch! tch! Didn't your mother ever teach you anything?"

"She never taught me to wash diapers."

"Well, you can't wash them in the dishpan."

"I can't wash them in the sink."

"Then you will have to take them down to the garage."

"After I've got this place all heated up? It is cold down there."

"If you will get your bus started and take us out of here you won't have to do another thing."

"All right, all right. I'll do 'em in the garage."

"And there is no use getting mad about it. Doesn't your instructions say to be pleasant and smiling at all times?"

Dusty scowled. "I never heard of a driver having to wash diapers before."

"It is just one of those unforeseen things like backing a bus into a rock and damaging the heating equipment. Look at the inconvenience it is causing our passengers. Do you suppose we like to sit up here all night when we could be home in our nice soft beds?"

Dusty picked up the now dripping squares and started for the garage without further word.

"Remember," Lydia called to him. "Rinse them thoroughly."

Internal heat kept Dusty warm for a short time but it wore off. He wouldn't want a little baby to suffer because of him and besides, Fallon was just the sort who would take it up with the superintendent. When it got too cold he went upstairs and got his coat.

Varney followed him back down.

"A little nip of Black Bart would warm a fellow up," he suggested wistfully, after watching Dusty rub lustily for a few minutes.

"Yeh," Dusty admitted, stopping to push his sleeves up again. He had a hard time keeping his coat sleeves out of the water.

"I left a flask nearly full in the bus," Varney continued.

"Yeh," Dusty wasn't paying enough attention to the old fellow to get the import of his talk.

"I could go down and get it if you would let me take the lantern."

"I need this lantern. The baby has to have clean diapers."

"I could go down to the bus as soon as you are finished. In weather like this a fellow needs a nip."

What Varney was suggesting finally infiltrated through Dusty's confused thoughts. "You mean you want a drink?"

"Yes, sir. This cold weather sort of gets a fellow. A swig of Black Bart would be just the thing."

"Black Bart?" Dusty repeated.

"Yes, sir. I left a bottle of Black Bart nearly full on the bus. I bought it when we stopped at Reno," and then seeing Dusty's scowl added. "I didn't drink any on the bus though after you told me not to."

IT WASN'T that that made Dusty scowl. He remembered that it was a half-emptied flask of Old Atlas he had found alongside the dead Dolly Pamins. He recalled only too clearly the picture of Atlas holding the world on his shoulders that appeared on the label. He remembered Kyburz saying it was one of the most expensive of whiskies. Black Bart wasn't expensive. It was cheap rotgut.

He grabbed hastily for his pocket.

He had picked up the flask of Old Atlas and put it in his pocket to show to the superintendent. What he brought out now was not Old Atlas. Illumined by the rays of the lantern what stared up at him from the label was not a giant supporting a world but a one-eyed pirate holding a cutlass in his teeth, Black Bart.

Dusty took the steps two at a time and burst into the living room wild-eyed.

"Where are those diapers?" Lydia asked at once.

"Where is Kyburz?" Dusty countered.

Lydia jerked her head toward the kitchen. "Heating some milk for the baby."

Dusty found him calmly heating water on the kitchen stove, holding a baby's bottle in his hand.

"Look," Dusty shouted, shoving the flask under his nose. "This isn't what we found in the bus."

Kyburz pushed the flask away. "Who said it was?"

"But this is what I found in my pocket. It was Old Atlas we found in the bus. Didn't you see me put it in my pocket?"

Kyburz nodded without looking up.

"Somebody must have switched bottles on me."

"Evidently," Kyburz admitted calmly.

"Do you know what that means?"

"Sure. Someone slipped the old girl knock-out drops and then got scared."

"But that—that—" Dusty could only whisper it, "is murder."

CHAPTER II

"It Takes All Kinds—"

THE liquor was gurgling down Varney's throat before Dusty could con-

quer his surprise. He'd followed Dusty upstairs and into the kitchen and picked up the bottle the minute it was set down.

"Hey!" Dusty shouted and reached for the bottle.

"What's the matter?" Varney asked, bewildered at the strange look on Dusty's face.

"You can't drink that. It's—it's—" but he shouldn't tell Varney that. "Damn it! You've had enough."

Murdered, both of them. Was he messed up in some more trouble like that?

He thought of his friend Rockingham Blake. Rocky was a detective and accustomed to murder. But Rocky was rounding up Japs and shipping them out of defense zones. Marooned up here in the mountains he was all alone. Whatever was done he would have to do himself.

"Might just as well let him have it," Kyburz said. "He is not riding a bus now."

"But this—"

"Nothing the matter with that whiskey, or there shouldn't be."

Dusty hesitated, looked solemnly at picture of the one-eyed pirate on the label and handed it to Varney.

"Thank you," Varney said, and hurried away as if he was afraid Dusty would change his mind.

"If I were you," Kyburz said when the door had closed behind Varney. "I'd let the police do all the worrying. It is no skin off your nose."

Dusty stared at him. Kyburz, feeling the baby's bottle to see if it was warm enough, looked up and caught his gaze. "No," he said, shaking his head. "I didn't kill her."

"I-I-I—" Dusty stammered, wondering if the man was a mind reader.

"You were beginning to. I know the look. I'm just giving you some good advice."

Kyburz shrugged. "No reason at all. I just do it once in a while. No one has ever taken it yet."

"It must be somebody on my bus," Dusty mumbled, still shocked at finding out.

"Sure," Kyburz agreed. "And a person crazy enough to commit one murder won't stop at two."

"You think he might kill me."

"Why not? If you get in his way."

"But I've got to do something."

"Why?"

"It is my bus. The passengers are in my charge. I am responsible for what happens to them."

THERE was no expression to the gaze Kyburz turned on Dusty. Dusty wondered if it was possible for the man to show any feeling at all. Nevertheless he felt that way down deep Kyburz was either amused at him or something. He couldn't put his finger on it exactly but he felt that the man wasn't as cold and hard as he seemed.

"Bus officials pay no premium on dead bus drivers," was all he said.

Dusty wriggled uncomfortably. "It is a hell of a mess."

Kyburz nodded. "And you won't make it any less so by messing around in it." He left to take the bottle in to the baby. Dusty went back downstairs and got the diapers.

He gave them to Lydia and she spread them out on some newspapers before the fire. She grinned at him aggravatingly.

"You will make a nice husband for some girl one of these days."

"Ar-r-r!" Dusty growled and retreated to the other side of the fireplace. He sat down on the floor and tried to appear diligently occupied in making out reports while studying the occupants of the room surreptitiously. Despite Kyburz's warning he thought he

ought to do something. He couldn't very well let some one get away with murder and do nothing at all.

He consulted the witness cards they had made out for the accident and the tickets he'd taken up. The lady with the baby, Mrs. Esther Carlin. She was the wife of one of the men wounded at Pearl Harbor and was going to San Francisco to meet him. Silly to even suspect her. A lady with a baby wouldn't commit murder besides she had come straight through from the East on this schedule. She couldn't even know the murdered Dolly Pomins.

Mark Cyr and Arlene Trask. Those were the two love birds now occupying one chair. They had turned the chair around so the back was toward the others and they were in the shadows. The fire was furnishing all the light in the room except that from the lantern which he had set on the floor nearby to use in making out his reports. The girl was sitting on the man's lap and as Dusty glanced that way ran her hand through his hair. Murder wasn't what was on their minds. They had been that way ever since they had got on the bus at Reno. They had surrendered the return portion of round trip tickets purchased at the same office at the same time. The form and number of the tickets ran consecutively. Could be that they had sneaked over to Reno to get married during the week-end. The address given by the girl was evidently in a residential section but the man had merely put down San Francisco.

The sailor, Cliff Canby, had come through from the East but he had stopped off between schedules at Reno. Why was that? He didn't look like a murderer. He looked like a youngster but then a uniform makes most men appear younger. Had he just stopped over to take in the town or was there

some sinister reason? Dusty couldn't see him in connection with murder. He looked too much like a young fellow away from home for the first time and agog with the excitement of change and novelty. Dusty might be wearing the same sort of uniform if he hadn't been told to stay where he was until called. Transportation was more important right now than recruits.

Dale Rupert, the fellow who was garbed about like Varney with sheep-skinlined coat, top boots and heavy woolen shirt, had bought a ticket at Reno for San Francisco. He was a pleasant appearing man wearing thick lensed glasses and certainly several notches above Varney in intelligence. He certainly couldn't be a herb hunter but, was he a murderer?

Ryde, the fellow sticking so close to Lydia, was a different sort of person altogether. Somehow he seemed familiar. Dusty felt he must have seen him some place or other. He affected the cowboy boots and hat that a lot of Nevada people did but his clothes were the latest cut and expensive. He did no tramping about in the snow as Varney and Rupert did. He had boarded the bus at the Quarantine station but Dusty hadn't bothered to take up his ticket then as he had to make a stop at Truckee just a few miles down the road. At Truckee Ryde had presented a rail ticket and Dusty made him buy a bus ticket. Evidently he had intended taking the train. There was a Reno set-out sleeper and he could go to bed in that any time after nine and wake up at Oakland Pier in the morning. Something had made him change his mind and catch the bus. Without any doubt Lydia was that something.

DUSTY didn't blame him. Lydia wasn't at all bad looking and judging from her actions pretty well-

off. She could be one of those women who traded their husbands in for a good-sized alimony check, or she could be, from the efficient way she went at things, a business woman perfectly capable of looking after herself and keeping a husband as a pet. Once he might have wondered why people so apparently well-off as she and Ryde took the bus in preference to the train but not any more. Buses now offered as much comfort and more convenience than trains.

Dusty was down to his last witness slip. Earl Swan? Now who the dickens was Earl Swan? He looked about the room. He'd catalogued everyone in it and there was no Earl Swan. He counted them. Nine people. Ten with himself. Twelve altogether with the baby and the dead woman and there had been thirteen on his bus. Somebody was missing. He glanced up and found Kyburz's cold gaze appraising him.

"Someone missing?" Kyburz asked.

Dusty nodded. "Earl Swan."

"Got on at Truckee," Kyburz commented.

Dusty examined his ticket stubs and saw that Kyburz was right. He recalled Swan now. A thin faced man with an unhealthy complexion and not any too well dressed. He hadn't paid much attention to him for he had got on just as he was arguing with Ryde about the use of a rail ticket for a trip by bus. Rail tickets are honored by buses between certain points but Reno and San Francisco aren't shown in the tariff.

Dusty started to put on his coat.

"Going after him?" Kyburz asked.

"He may be lost," Dusty explained.

"He'll freeze to death out doors in this weather."

Kyburz walked to the door with him.

"You don't need to go," Dusty told him.

"I'm not," Kyburz said. He closed the door to the living room carefully, took a gun out of his hip pocket and handed it to Dusty.

Dusty backed away.

"You may need it," Kyburz said.

Dusty shook his head. "I never shot one of those things. I'd kill myself with it."

Kyburz put the gun back in his pocket. "Okay. It is your funeral."

The snow was a foot deep now. Dusty plodded through it determinedly, his thoughts in a turmoil. So Swan was the one. He'd taken advantage of the woman's drinking and slipped her a doped bottle. How had he done it and why? Was he the husband she had discarded in Reno? Had he followed her? Had she been so drunk she hadn't recognized him when he got on the bus or had she deliberately ignored him? Had her scorn and his jealousy driven him into a murderous rage? The doped liquor seemed more like deliberate planning than ungovernable temper.

Swan was not in the bus. As far as Dusty could see he had never come near it. The snow around the bus showed no footprints. The door was closed tight and Dusty doubted Swan's ability to open it from the outside.

INSIDE the bus nothing seemed changed. Dusty held the lantern high so its beams would reach to the back. The woman lay just as they had left her, straight and stiff. Gazing into her frozen features gave him the willies. He dropped into a seat and tried to peer out of the snow filled window. Where had Swan gone? He couldn't get far in this weather without a pair of snowshoes.

He sat there shivering, wondering what to do and caught the sound of an automobile. The noise of the engine

echoed along the walls of the canyon. He got out of the bus and stood on the highway ready to swing the lantern and flag it down. It was coming from the Summit. Flashes of light reflected from the snow on the opposite side of the canyon. The sound came nearer and nearer, the car came around the turn and stopped just a few feet from him.

"Unhuh!" came the mocking voice of the highway maintenance superintendent. "Hit something you couldn't move."

Dusty ignored the taunt and moved to get out of the blinding glare of the headlights. He almost gasped as he caught sight of Swan sitting alongside the superintendent.

"How did you get there?" Dusty demanded.

"I picked him up," the superintendent stated. "Haven't you got any better sense than to let your passengers go wandering about in weather like this?"

Dusty stared at Swan. "Where were you going?"

"I got to get back," Swan muttered. He appeared to be all in and about half frozen.

"Back where? You had a ticket to Sacramento."

"I got to get back to Nevada."

"The guy would be dead by now if I hadn't picked him up," the superintendent put in. "What happened anyway?"

Dusty told him.

"Damn!" the superintendent swore. "It never rains but it pours."

"How soon will you have the highway cleared?" Dusty asked.

"Daylight."

"Daylight? Not till daylight?"

"We'll be damn lucky if we get it done then. We've got another slide on the other side of the Summit to clear

up."

"How about borrowing your car to get my passengers to a rail stop?"

"Won't do you any good?"

"Why?"

"The trains aren't moving. The snow sheds are blocked. The railroad is trying to get buses to get their passengers through. That is how I happened to come down here to see what happened to you. Your dispatcher is calling all up and down the line. Why didn't you report in?"

"Do you know where there is a telephone anywhere within walking distance of this spot?"

The superintendent hadn't anything to say to that. He glanced at the bus and walked on down to the fallen tree. Dusty followed.

"Will you phone our dispatcher at Sacramento when you get back and tell him the set-up?"

"What good will that do?"

"He can send up a light bus. It can come up as far as this obstruction and turn around. I can load my passengers on it and get 'em out."

The superintendent scowled. "You've got your passengers where they are warm and protected; haven't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"Better keep 'em that way then. This snow is going to be feet deep before we can do anything. Nobody is going to be able to move until we can get a plow through."

"But a light bus—"

"A light bus would never make it. This is one of the heaviest storms we've had for sometime." The superintendent walked back to his car. "And take this fellow up and get him thawed out before he gets pneumonia."

"Can't I go back with you?" Swan pleaded.

"Back where?"

"Nevada."

"You can't get back to Nevada or anywhere else till we clear up these slides."

"But couldn't I go up to the Summit and wait there?"

"No. I haven't got time to look after bus passengers. We've got a night's work ahead of us, and I mean work."

"Please, mister."

"Out you go. Come on, get a wiggle on you. If I don't get back pronto I'll be snowed in."

SWAN got out of the car very reluctantly. The superintendent turned the car about and headed up the hill without a backward glance.

"What was the big idea?" Dusty demanded of Swan. "You ought to know better than go wandering about in a snow storm."

Swan tried to pull his coat closer about him. Dusty was almost sorry for him. He shivered like he had the ague and looked ready to drop.

"I had to."

"Had to what?"

"Had to get back to Nevada."

"You just left there. What did you buy a ticket to Sacramento for if you have to be in Nevada."

"That was before—before—" Swan nodded toward the bus.

"What has a bus stalling got to do with your getting back to Nevada?"

"It wasn't the bus stalling. It was that—that jane."

"What do you mean? What did you have to do with her?"

"Nothing, so help me nothing."

"Then what are you worrying about?"

Swan looked questioningly at Dusty and said in a whisper. "She was knocked off."

"You killed her, you mean."

Terror came into Swan's eyes. "Hon-

est, mister, I didn't have nothing to do with her. I never saw her before."

"Then how do you know she was knocked off?"

"I've seen people get that way before. Somebody gave her knock-out drops."

"You are the only one who knows she is dead," Dusty accused, wondering about Kyburz as he said it.

"Somebody else knows it. The somebody that put the stuff in her hooch."

"Do you know who did it?"

Swan shook his head wildly. "Honest, mister. I don't know a thing about it."

"Were you her husband?"

Downright panic showed in Swan's eyes. Dusty backed away thinking suddenly that the man might lash out with a knife or something. After all the fellow was a killer.

"Honest, mister," Swan cried again.

"You got to believe me. I didn't have a thing to do with it."

"For a person who is innocent you act mighty queer."

"I'm in a jam. Honest. I'm in a terrible jam."

"You certainly are. You'll be hung, sure."

"But I tell you I didn't do it. I don't even know who she is."

"Her name is Dolly Pomins and she just got a divorce in Reno."

"It is the first I ever heard of her."

"If you didn't have a thing to do with it what are you scared of?"

"I'll be blamed for it."

"Nonsense. Who is going to blame you?"

"The coppers."

"The police will find out who really did it. I wish they were here now."

SWAN showed signs of panic again.

"No, no. They won't even try. They will blame me."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because—because—" Swan glanced all around like a trapped animal seeking a way to escape. "Because I'm an ex-con."

"Ex-con? You mean a convict?"

"I just got out on good behavior."

"How do you come to be here then?"

"That's the rub. I'm not supposed to leave the state without notifying the parole board."

"Why didn't you notify them?"

"I was just going to see a jane. I was coming right back."

Dusty jerked his head toward the bus.

"Was that the jane?"

"No, no, no," Swan cried.

"What were you put in jail for?"

"I was pulled in with some wire workers. I didn't belong to the mob, so help me. I hit the joint just as the coppers swamped it."

Dusty appeared skeptical.

"Honest, mister, if I hadn't been stewed I'd never have gone near the joint."

"I suppose you have sworn off liquor now for ever?"

• Swan shivered. "God, but I'd like a shot right now. I'm colder than a brass monkey."

"What kind of whiskey do you drink? Old Atlas?"

Swan looked to see if Dusty were kidding. "That stuff is too expensive for me. I drink rotgut."

"Like Black Bart?"

Swan wet his lips. "I could do with a swig of Black Bart right now."

"Well, come on. There is a fellow at the cabin who has some of that," Dusty said, and added under his breath. "And somebody's got some Old Atlas, too."

Swan still hesitated.

"You heard what the superintendent said," Dusty told him. "You can't get anywhere in this storm. You will have to wait till the highway is cleared."

"Just my luck," Swan whined. "The coppers will pin it on me sure."

"They won't if you didn't do it," Dusty said impatiently. "Policemen don't go around pinning crimes on innocent people."

DUSTY was thinking of big Brian Boro Monahan who had once been his side-kick on a run-out of Deseret and later became a policeman. Monahan, the big Mick, wouldn't take advantage of anyone. Neither would Rocky Blake of the F.B.I.

"You don't know cops like I do."

"If you are innocent you don't have a thing to worry about."

"I'm innocent, honest to God. I didn't have a thing to do with the jane."

"Did you take any whiskey on the bus?"

"So help me, no."

"Did you see anyone else have any?"

"Only Whiskers. He's probably the jerk who did it."

"Varney is just a harmless old man."

"He is no prospector."

"How do you know?"

"A prospector is always talking about mines. The ones he owns or has found or is going to find. I could hear him talking to the jane. He never said a word about mines."

"He isn't a miner. He is a herb hunter."

"I thought he looked nutty. Maybe he is just cracked enough to go around killing women for the fun of it."

Dusty shook his head. "I don't think so. He may be simple but he isn't a killer."

"The fellow with the glasses has been in the hills, too."

"You mean Dale Rupert? Did you hear him talking about mines?"

"No, but he is outfitted for tough weather the same as Whiskers. He only took the spinach off his face recently."

"I wondered what made him appear so very clean shaven. I took him to be a stockman or miner."

"With whiskers he could 'pass for the other's twin'."

"He appeared to be a very pleasant person to me."

Swan glanced curiously at Dusty. "The fellow with the girl—"

"That is Mark Cyr. The girl is Arlene Trask." Dusty was cataloguing them in his mind again.

"He is a soldier."

"He isn't wearing a uniform."

"Makes it look sort of suspicious, doesn't it? Soldiers don't go around without their uniforms these days."

"How do you know he's a soldier?"

"Only a soldier calls work fatigue; talks about latrine rumors and K.P."

"If he had anything to do with it then the girl, Arlene Trask, would know it. They haven't been apart more than six inches since they got on the bus."

"It doesn't take two jiffies to slip knock-out drops in a drink. He could do it while he was turning around to say 'Do you get a draft here, dearie?'"

"But why should he do such a thing?"

"He might have been playing the floozie until this one showed up and she wouldn't let go."

Jealousy, thought Dusty, was the motive he had picked for pinning the murder on Swan. He wondered if Swan was playing smart by using the same motive to point at someone else.

"Do you know anything about Kyburz?" Dusty asked.

"The guy with the gimlet eyes? I'll say I do. He's taken plenty of my money. 'He runs a black jack game at Tom & Jerry's."

"A gambler?"

"One of the best in the business."

SO THAT was the reason back of the expressionless face and the artistic

hands. A gambler. A cold-blooded, unemotional gambler. A sleight-of-hand magician most likely. No one could more easily switch flasks and get away with it. And Kyburz wanted him to keep his nose out of things.

"You seem to know a lot about Reno, perhaps you know a fellow by name of Ryde. He is the dude who hangs about the tall gal so diligently."

"I never saw him before but if his name is Ryde he may be a big shot mining broker. There is a firm of Ryde and Cotton in Reno. They rate high."

"Cary Ryde is his name. His address is Second Avenue."

"That's the bird. He's a big shot mining broker. Makes plenty of dough. I'll bet Kyburz's taken him for plenty too. I heard he was a gambler."

So there might be something besides simple jealousy back of the death of Dolly Pomins. Dusty was beginning to get a little mixed up. He had left the cabin with the firm idea that Swan was the killer, and Kyburz had skillfully helped that idea along with his offer of his gun and the warning. Now he was beginning to think that Kyburz was the guilty person and wasn't so sure but some of the others might be mixed up in it. He motioned Swan to go ahead of him along the trail to the cabin. Shivering in clothes never meant for such cold weather, Swan didn't look much like a killer but Dusty wasn't taking any chances. He marched behind Swan and threw the lantern beams ahead of him so Swan could see to stay on the path.

Swan stumbled rather than walked. He was pretty close to being all in. He would probably get pneumonia and die and Dusty would catch hell for that. A driver wasn't just a driver. He was supposed to be a companion, nurse and guardian for all and sundry.

"That was a hell of a trick," Dusty

blurted out his feelings. "You ought to know you couldn't get anywhere in this weather."

Swan appeared to be too far gone to reply. He lurched forward, falling and recovering, rather than walking. When they reached the cabin he headed straight for the outside stairs, making the same mistake Dusty had on his first trip.

"Come on back," Dusty shouted. "Those stairs don't go anywhere." He grabbed Swan's arm and started him up the inside stairway. And then it hit him. Swan couldn't be the murderer. Not if the murderer had switched flasks on him. The switching of flasks had been done while his coat hung on the back of a chair up in the living room. Swan was never in that room. Swan hadn't been here before at all. If he had he wouldn't have made the mistake about the stairways.

Lydia's first words as they entered the living room confirmed his discovery. "Well," she said, looking Swan over curiously. "Where did you find him?"

"Wandering about," Dusty told her. He made Swan get up as close to the fire as possible and take off his shoes. They were soaked through.

"Is he one of our crowd? One of your passengers?"

Dusty regarded her suspiciously. He was beginning to suspicion everyone. "He sat right back of you and—" He jerked his head toward Ryde.

Lydia looked surprised. "Is that so? He looks half dead. What he needs is a hot drink."

"Of what?"

Lydia grinned at him provokingly. "You wait a few minutes and I will show you."

DUSTY took off his coat, hung it over the back of a chair and sat

down near the fire. He thought he could do with a hot drink himself and wouldn't object a great deal if it had some white mule in it or Black Bart, anything but Old Atlas. He didn't think he would ever want to take a drink of Old Atlas.

He tried to sort out his thoughts and get them in order. If Swan wasn't the guilty person someone else must be. Funny that a little thing like not knowing where the stairs were proved that a man wasn't guilty. That was what Rocky Blake would no doubt call a clue only one with reverse English. It proved a man innocent. Now he would have to look for one that would prove someone guilty.

He glanced casually about the room. The baby and its mother were fast asleep on the sofa. The soldier and his girl, still, occupying one chair between 'em, appeared to be asleep but weren't for the girl looked over the top of the chair at Dusty and said. "How much longer are we going to have to stay here?"

"It depends on the highway maintenance crew. We can't move until they clear the highway."

"Haven't you any idea when that will be?"

Dusty hesitated. "It will probably be sometime."

The girl was wide awake now. "But we can't stay here. I have to be at work in the morning."

"Your boss will excuse you if you tell him the bus was stalled by a slide."

"Mine won't," the man stated.

"What will you be? A.W.O.L. or S.O.L.?"

The girl gasped. "How did you guess?"

"What did you do? Go over to Reno to get married?"

The girl opened her mouth and couldn't get it shut. "Why, why—"

The man nodded.

"Tell your C.O.," Dusty advised. "I'll back you up in anything you say."

The girl glanced down at her husband. "Will they put you in the hoosgow?"

Dusty saw him squeeze her. "If they do it will be worth it."

RYDE spoke up. He was sitting at a table playing cards with Kyburz, Rupert and the sailor. Dusty noted that most of the matches they were using for chips were in front of Kyburz.

"You say we will be here some time?" he asked Dusty.

"Looks that way," Dusty admitted. "Can't do a thing until the road crew clears the way."

"I knew I should have taken the train," Lydia said.

"It may take days for the trains to get through," Dusty told her gleefully. "The snowsheds are blocked."

Dusty was counting on his fingers again. Somebody was missing. It was Varney.

"Is Whiskers \out getting more wood?" he asked Lydia.

"Just don't get impatient," Lydia told him.

"What do you mean?"

"I sent him down to the bus to get something for me."

"When did you do this?"

"Oh, just a little while before you came in."

"But I didn't see him anywhere?"

"Why should you?"

"He'd have to pass us to get to the bus. We didn't see anybody at all." Dusty looked over at Swan for confirmation but Swan was huddled over the fire unmindful of anything but his own condition.

"He really ought to have something hot to drink," Lydia stated.

"Is that what you sent Varney for?"

Lydia nodded.

"He is drinking it up himself most likely," Ryde said.

"I don't think he would do that,"

Lydia stated.

"He was lit up as it was," Ryde insisted.

Lydia looked worried. "You don't think he could have got lost?"

"Probably has," Dusty admitted aloud but to himself he was saying something else. He had a feeling he would find Varney in the same condition he had found Dolly Pomins. Somebody had switched flasks again, given the old fellow the doped liquor. He got to his feet.

"Are you going out?" Rupert asked, looking up from the cards he was dealing.

"Yes," Dusty said.

"Better take my coat then," he nodded toward the sheepskin coat on the back of another chair. "It is better protection in this weather than yours."

"Thanks," Dusty said, and picked up the coat. It was a lot better than his for this kind of weather. He didn't relish going out again at all but didn't see what else he could do. The well-being of his passengers was his responsibility.

"Oh, I do hope nothing has happened to the old fellow," Lydia said compassionately.

She sounded sincere but Dusty wondered about it just the same. "Did he take the other lantern?"

Lydia nodded.

"We couldn't have failed to see that," Dusty said. "If he had been on the trail at all."

"Want me to go along with you?" Ryde asked.

Dusty shook his head. "No, if I need any help I'll holler."

"Will you be going down to the bus?"

Lydia asked.

"I might," Dusty said. "Depends on where I find him."

"Well, if you do, will you bring my overnight bag up? That is what he was going to get for me. It is in the baggage rack right overhead. It is black and has my initials on it. L.F."

STILL snowing. Dusty stood at the entrance to the garage and threw the rays of his lantern all about. Off the trail the snow plow had made the snow was several feet deep. Hardly any chance of Varney wandering off unless he was very drunk and if he had his trail was sure to be well marked. There was no sign of a break in the snow.

Dusty went slowly along the path studying the marks along the trail. An Indian or a scout could probably tell which was which but he couldn't. It was just a lot of feet marks to him. Some dragged their feet and some stepped hard and solidly and lifted their feet clear of the snow. The falling snow was fast covering them up but it would be sometime before all trace would be obliterated.

Varney must have come along this way but if he had he should have seen him. Coming along with a lighted lantern he would have been in sight from the time they entered the canyon. The only time he would not be in sight was when Swan and he were leaving the spot where the superintendent had left them and coming around the obstruction in the highway. He must have got off the path there but Dusty examined everything closely as he went along.

There was no sign of Varney anywhere. Dusty continued on to the bus. About it he could read the trail pretty well. His own feet had been the only ones to break the snow that had fallen

since they had all gone up to the cabin. Where the superintendent's car had stopped were three sets of shoe tracks, the superintendent's, Swan's and his own. Varney couldn't have got down this far.

HE ENTERED the bus, shivered as he saw again the cold, stiff form of Dolly Pomins. He picked up a newspaper from one of the seats and put it over her face. He found Lydia's overnight case in the baggage rack and set it on a seat while he climbed in behind the wheel to think. He felt at home there and ideas came to him better. He wondered how Rocky Blake set about collecting clues and how you knew a clue when you saw it. A lot of queer notions circulated through his mind.

Somebody must have got Varney. The old man was probably the one they were after in the first place. They had slipped him some doped liquor, an easy thing to do especially in the half drunk condition he was in. It hadn't harmed him then because he had been afraid to touch it after Dusty had bawled him out. He must have passed the booze on to Dolly. She wouldn't pay any attention to his warning. Women never do. Tell 'em not to drink on the bus and they will do it just to show you that they are free, white and twenty-one. Women are always doing something to show they are independent. Like cutting their hair, smoking or wearing slacks. The next thing would be chewing tobacco. The surest way to get them to do anything is to forbid it.

But why should anyone want to kill Varney? He appeared to be a simple soul who wouldn't hurt anyone. Ryde for instance. Ryde was in the money. A rich and successful mining broker. What could he possibly have against a

herb hunter? Canby, the sailor. He couldn't have known Varney before he got on the bus. Fallon. Would a woman kill an old man just for the fun of it? There couldn't be any other reason. Kyburz, a gambler. Well, there was something there. Who could tell what went on behind that expressionless mask? Perhaps Varney won a pot of money from him. Maybe they were related. Varney might have something on him. But what can you get on a gambler? Rupert. Was it a coincidence that he and Varney wore clothes so much alike? Why had Rupert shaved off his beard? Was is so he wouldn't look so much like Varney? Perhaps they were relatives and Rupert was ashamed of him.

Dusty reached in his pocket for a cigarette, forgetting that he was wearing Rupert's coat. He brought out two ticket stubs. One reading from Lovelock to Reno and the other Reno to San Francisco.

A dozen thoughts flooded his mind instantly. Varney had boarded the bus at Lovelock. What was the connection? Varney and Rupert must have looked a great deal alike about that time. Both wearing sheepskin coats and high boots. Both with whiskers. Why had Rupert shaved his off? Why had he bought just to Reno then on to San Francisco? Had he been following Varney? Of course, the fact that the tickets had been purchased the same day didn't mean that Varney and Rupert had traveled on the same bus. Rupert might have gone into Reno on an earlier bus. And the fact that they dressed alike and wore whiskers might mean nothing. Ranchers, stockmen, miners, all wore heavy clothes of the same sort in winter and plenty of them, let their whiskers grow to protect their faces. Still, it did seem quite a coincidence. Was Rupert the murderer?

CHAPTER III

The Second Corpse

DUSTY found no trace of Varney on his way back to the cabin although he searched even more thoroughly than he had on the way to the bus.

The deep snow on either side of the path made by the snow plow was unbroken and the newly fallen snow in the path was not yet deep enough to cover a man's body. Clearly Varney could never have left the cabin.

When he came into the living room he saw that all were there except Lydia and Rupert. They were in the kitchen heating water by the light of a flash-light. There were only two lanterns about the place and Dusty had taken one of those and Varney the other. Dusty set his lantern down on the kitchen table and handed the overnight case to Lydia.

"Didn't you find the old man?" Lydia asked.

Dusty shook his head.

"But where could he be? He left here a long time ago."

"He didn't go down to the bus," Dusty advised.

"Something must have happened to him."

"Undoubtedly."

"Did he have any liquor?" Rupert asked.

Dusty nodded. "A flask of Black Bart."

"He is probably in some corner, dead to the world."

Dusty had the same idea but he thought Varney would be so dead when they found him that he would never come out of it.

"But the poor man will freeze to death," Lydia said.

Rupert looked inquiringly at Dusty. "Think we ought to organize a search-

ing party?"

Dusty shook his head. "I'll take another look. No use anyone else freezing if they can help it. Oh, by the way," he tried to sound casual, as he held out the ticket stubs he had found in Rupert's coat. "I found these in your pocket. How did you happen to buy from Lovelock to Reno and Reno to San Francisco instead of buying straight through?"

"I intended going only as far as Reno when I started out but learned in Reno that the party I wanted to see had left for the city."

"I see. What schedule did you take out of Lovelock?"

"Oh, I left early in the morning. Around five o'clock."

"Then you stopped over in Reno all morning?"

"Yes. I had both breakfast and lunch there. I intended going back to Lovelock on the afternoon bus but found I would have to go on to San Francisco so bought a ticket for your bus."

"You would save money by buying a round trip ticket, that is, if you are going back to Lovelock."

"I'll try and fly back."

Dusty turned to go.

"You'd better have some of this before you go out in the cold again," Lydia said.

Dusty's eyes bulged as he caught sight of the label on the bottle Lydia took from her overnight bag. Atlas holding the world on his shoulders. "Where did you get that?" he demanded.

Lydia smiled provokingly. "A friend of mine. A very nice friend."

"He knows good liquor," Rupert remarked.

"He drinks only the very best," Lydia bragged.

Dusty took the bottle from her hands

and noticed that the seal was unbroken. "You didn't have another bottle like this?"

Lydia shook her head. "Sorry."

DUSTY'S thoughts took another turn. Here was Lydia with a bottle of the same sort of liquor that had killed Dolly—out in the kitchen alone with Rupert whom he had just decided must have something to do with the girl's death and the disappearance of Varney. What did it mean? He had been under the impression that most of the passengers on his bus were unacquainted with each other. Perhaps he'd better revise that idea.

Lydia was trying to uncork the bottle. "You ought to have a hot drink really."

"Here let me do that for you," Rupert offered.

"Never mind," Lydia said, rummaging through her bag. "I've got something right here that will do it."

A folded paper fell from her bag and fluttered to the floor. Rupert retrieved it. He started to hand it to her but it came open and his eyes bulged with surprise. "Why, why, but this is really a coincidence."

"What?" both Lydia and Dusty said.

"Why, you must be the very person I was going to San Francisco to see."

"Me?"

"Are you Miss Fallon?"

"Yes."

"Didn't you just purchase the old Coronet mine?"

Lydia nodded. "Yes, I did. Why?"

"That is what I wanted to see you about."

"What about it?"

"How did you come to buy it?"

"A friend of mine told me it was a very good buy."

"Did he know about it?"

"Oh, yes. He said it ought to make

me rich."

Rupert looked puzzled. "Funny. I don't see how he could know that."

"Oh, he knows all about mines."

"Did he tell you that it had trithemium?"

It was Lydia's turn to look puzzled. "What's that?"

"It is a metal used in making explosives. It has only recently been discovered, but the war is making it extremely valuable."

"Then you think it will really make me rich?"

"It will if the war keeps up."

"Wheel!" Lydia shouted, grabbed Dusty and began to dance about the room.

Rupert frowned at her.

"What is the matter?" Lydia queried, letting go of Dusty.

"It would be better if you didn't say anything to anyone."

"Why?"

"Well, as I said, it is something new and the fewer people who know about it the less chance our enemies will have of hearing about it. These days there is great danger of sabotage. If someone dropped a bomb in the mine it would cause great delay."

Lydia seemed impressed. "Shouldn't I tell anyone about it?"

"It would be a whole lot better and safer if you didn't."

"Look," Dusty broke in as a new thought struck him. "You don't think there is any danger, do you?"

"How do you mean?"

"Suppose someone wanted to get the mine away from Miss Fallon?"

"I don't see how they could do that, not if she has a clear title."

Lydia shoved the certificate into Rupert's hand. "Is it all right?"

RUPERT studied it thoughtfully.

"Yes, as far as I can see you

have a clear title. What I don't understand is how anyone knew the mine was valuable. I thought I was the only one who knew that and I only discovered its value a few days ago."

"The Coronet isn't a new mine," Dusty said. "I've heard that name before."

"It isn't a new mine," Rupert admitted. "The shaft has been sunk for a good many years, I think, for a gold mine but no gold has ever been taken out of it."

"But I was told there was gold in it," Lydia objected.

"Is that why you bought it?" Rupert asked.

Lydia nodded.

"No one said anything about trithemium?"

Lydia shook her head.

Rupert smiled. "Perhaps then our secret hasn't been discovered."

"Is that good?"

"Very good."

"But I don't understand."

"You were played for a sucker," Dusty broke in. "Only it turned out different."

Lydia still appeared puzzled.

"This friend of yours," Rupert began, "the one who advised you to buy the mine, had you known him very long?"

Lydia hesitated. "Yes. I've known him a long time, just casually, of course. Only recently—"

"You didn't recently come into some money, did you?" Rupert asked.

"Yes, I did. I—"

Rupert nodded wisely.

"You mean someone tried to cheat me?" Lydia queried, still puzzled.

"They did cheat you lady," Dusty broke in. "They sold you a mine that was worthless."

"But you said it was rich," Lydia accused Rupert.

"It is," Rupert assured her, "but that is something else again. You bought it for a gold mine and there is no gold in it. However there is trithemium and if that had been known you wouldn't have been able to buy the mine."

"I see," Lydia appeared very thoughtful. She made a hot toddy and took it into the living room for Swan.

Dusty followed her in. He saw that all but Varney were present and accounted for. Ryde, Kyburz and the sailor were still playing cards. The pile of matches in front of Kyburz was growing larger.

He went down the stairs, swinging the lantern from side to side, halting to turn around and look back of him every few steps. The back of his neck prickled as he thought how easy it would be for someone to put a foot at the base of his spine and send him hurtling to the cement floor below. Perhaps that had happened to Varney.

HE STOOD at the bottom of the steps and looked all about carefully before moving. The lower floor of the cabin had originally been built to accommodate four cars and had been divided by semi-partitions, light boards only part way across. Only one stall was clear, the others crowded with miscellaneous items that collected in spite of anything. Things no longer needed but too good to throw away. The first stall besides having the inside stairway was piled high with wood.

If Varney had decided to finish off the Black Bart before going on to the bus he might be in some corner and if he had been killed he might still be in some corner. Dusty gave each garage a cursory examination at first, walking swiftly from one to the other swinging the lantern. When he found no trace of Varney he settled down to make a

thorough search. He must be here somewhere.

He looked behind and under everything he thought even a dog could crawl but no sign of the herb hunter. 'He wanted to shout his name but thought it just as well not to let everybody upstairs know the old man was missing. So far Lydia, Rupert and perhaps one other knew about it. That is the way detectives worked, kept everything they could to themselves.

He came across a pair of snowshoes and put them out near the stairway. They might come in handy. If something didn't break loose soon he would put them on and see if he couldn't get to a telephone. He started to go back to continue the search when a bit of color caught his eyes as the lantern swung. It was the scarf Lydia had had tied around her ears. It was lying near the stairway like it might have dropped from above. Dusty stooped to pick it up.

The scarf jerked out of his hand and he almost sat down. It was caught on something. He turned the lantern to see it better and almost lost his breath. The scarf was under the end of a big box and the box was up against the stairs. The box must have been moved after the scarf had fallen. Dusty stared at it for several moments, scared of what he was going to find behind that box. There could be a body under those stairs.

There was. Varney's.

Dusty pulled the box away and there it was, jammed under the steps. Varney had never got there himself. Somebody had shoved him there forcibly after he had been killed. The box had been pulled up to make a little cubbyhole.

IT SEEMED to Dusty that he sat there on his heels staring at the

crumpled body of the herb hunter for hours. For a time his mind went blank. Nothing registered. Then to make up for lost time a thousand things came crowding in. All the events of the night, from the time he took over the through schedule at Reno to this moment, rushed by in review so fast that they seemed all mixed up.

Varney getting on at Reno, even then well-oiled. Ryde presenting a rail ticket at Truckee. The bawling out the superintendent of highway maintenance had given him at the Summit. Hitting the tree that had fallen across the highway. Backing up and wrecking the circulating system. Coming here to this cabin. Finding the dead woman. The drugged liquor. Kyburz's cool behavior. Swan missing and found. Lydia and Rupert. Could the mine she had been so foolish or so wise to buy, have anything to do with it? What was back of it all?

The lantern Varney had been carrying was on the floor at the side of the body. It was out but had not been smashed. It couldn't have fallen. The murderer must have put the light out and placed it here. The bottle of Black Bart was in a pocket. It didn't seem to Dusty that much had been taken from it since he had last seen it. Varney didn't look like he had been drugged. He wasn't at all like the girl in the bus. Dusty thought he looked as if he had been strangled. Had Lydia's scarf been used for that? Could she have strangled Varney and in her excitement dropped the scarf?

Dusty went through Varney's pockets. He had to go to the outside door twice and take in deep breaths of cold air before he could finish. The dead man smelled of sour whiskey and tobacco. He didn't find a thing that would show that Varney was other than he said he was, a herb hunter. Dusty

wondered if he could possibly have stumbled on the mine in his travels about the hills and knew that it was valuable? But suppose he had. What about it?

Dusty caught sight of the snowshoes and decided he'd better make use of them. What he needed more than anything else right now was the help of Rockingham Blake. The F.B.I. man was the only one to straighten this mess out.

He pushed the box back the way he had found it so the body wouldn't be seen by anyone going up or down the stairs. He hoped the murderer wouldn't find out that the body had been discovered. He even put the scarf back the way he had found it.

He fastened the snowshoes on and started out. It was almost as bad as he thought it would be but he didn't take any spills. His legs got tired from the unaccustomed labor but the snow was too deep to get anywhere without snowshoes. It took him a good couple of hours or more to make the four or five miles to the nearest place with a phone.

IT WAS a tavern and they had closed up when they learned that the highway would be closed for most of the night. The man and his wife who ran the place had gone to bed but they got up when Dusty told them who he was and let him in to use the phone. Dusty tried to get Blake at his apartment without success. He called the dispatcher at Sacramento then and reported.

"How much longer are you going to be?" the dispatcher wanted to know.

"I don't know," Dusty told him. "It is up to the highway crew. You better send out a mechanic. 450 is on the fritz."

"What is the matter with it?"

"I backed into a boulder and ruined

the circulating system. No heat."

"How many passengers have you got?"

"Thirteen—I had thirteen, I mean."

"How many have you got now?"

"Ten. One of 'em is a baby though. No ticket."

"No chance of your fixing the bus and coming in as soon as the highway is cleared?"

"Not a chance. It will take a mechanic or a tow car."

"The superintendent of the highway crew seemed to think you just didn't want to get out in the snow and work."

"That guy knows as much about a bus as I know about—about a murderer."

"Okay. I'll put a mechanic on 774. Put your passengers on 757 when it comes through there. By the way, a friend of yours was in a little while ago asking for you—Blake. He said he met you in Deseret."

"Blake!" Dusty yelled. "Is he there? Let me talk to him."

"He isn't here now. He stuck around till the highway people phoned in about the slide then went up to his hotel."

"What hotel is he at?"

"The Newport."

DUSTY cut the dispatcher off and put a call in for the Newport immediately. In a short time Blake was on the line.

"Hello, Dusty," Blacke called. "So you finally got in?"

"Like fun," Dusty growled. "I'm calling from up in the mountains."

"Oh, you didn't have to do that, Dusty. I just stopped in to say hello. I haven't been in your territory since—since our little trouble in Deseret."

"Look, Rocky," Dusty pleaded. "I'm in the same sort of jam again."

"You don't mean—you don't mean murder."

"That is exactly what I do mean. I got two of 'em on my hands and more to come for all I know."

"This is serious. Suppose you tell me just what happened."

"I hit a slide and had to move all my passengers up to a cabin to keep them from freezing to death. I found a girl dead on the back seat. Someone had given her knockout drops."

"Who was the other one?"

"The fellow who was with her. A harmless old coot, I thought. I took him for a prospector but he turned out to be a herb hunter."

"What made you think he was a prospector?"

"The way he was dressed. Sheepskin coat, top boots, corduroy trousers, and he hadn't shaved for months. A funny thing is that another fellow aboard who would look like a twin if he hadn't shaved is a mining man. What I mean is they are dressed alike."

"Perhaps it is a case of mistaken identity."

"You mean the murderer got the wrong fellow?"

"It has happened often. Who is this other man?"

"His name is Dale Rupert. I got him on my list as a suspect. His story is too pat. He says he got on at Lovelock to go to Reno to see the owner of a mine but when he got to Reno the owner had gone to San Francisco so he bought another ticket. Right in the middle of this murder mess he discovers that the person he was on his way to the city to see is on the bus. Her name is Lydia Fallon and he claims that the mine she just bought will make her rich."

"What is suspicious about that?"

"Don't you think it sounds fishy? Did you ever hear of trithemium?"

"Can't say that I have. What is it?"

"It is supposed to be some new metal used in making explosives but the whole

thing sounds to me like a build-up. You know, get a person to thinking something is extremely valuable then talking 'em into investing money in it."

"That is usually done before the purchase is made, but you say this woman has already bought the mine."

"She bought it all right but she thought it was a gold mine and according to Rupert there isn't a speck of gold in it. He claims it would be worthless except for this new metal."

"What is his interest in it?"

"Why—why, I don't know. I never thought to ask him about that."

"You'll have to do a lot of asking questions if you're going to be a detective," Rocky told him.

"I don't want to be a detective. I want to get out of this mess as soon as possible. Can't you come up here and straighten it out?"

"How can I get up there?"

DUSTY groaned.

"Damn it, you can't. Not until the highway is cleared anyway. You couldn't drive up. The trains and busses are blocked and there is no place to land a plane. What am I going to do?"

"Tell me more about it. Is this Rupert the only one you suspect?"

"Not by a long shot. There are several others. I even suspect Miss Fallon. Poison is a woman's weapon, isn't it. This mine business may be just so much hooley to cover something else up."

"What could she be covering up?"

"That is what I would like to know. Perhaps she and Ryde, a fellow who sticks closer to her than burrs on a dog, are cooking something up. Maybe they are trying to put something over on Kyburz."

"And who is Kyburz?"

"A gambler. About as cold-blooded article as you'll ever run into. He was with me when I found the woman dead

on the back seat. He never turned a hair. You'd think he'd been laying out dead people all his life. He just the same told me to lay off trying to discover who did it."

"What about Ryde?"

"He is supposed to be a Reno big shot. Plenty of money. He is making a heavy play for Miss Fallon. Say—"

"What's the matter?"

"It just now struck me. Maybe Ryde is after her mine. I thought she was the attraction. She's got something. What I mean, Oomph! but there are plenty of good-looking gals with money in Reno. Do you suppose that could be it?"

"I don't know, Dusty. Suppose you tell me just exactly what happened from the time you left Reno, just who was on your bus and all that. Perhaps I can help you that way. I can't the way you are giving it to me."

"Okay. Here goes. I left Reno on 773 right on the dot. I was right on time at the Summit and that's—"

"Wait a minute, Dusty," Blake interrupted. "You're skipping. Just who was on your bus? Did the two who were killed and the ones you suspect get on at Reno? Did you notice anything about them when they got on?"

"No," Dusty admitted. "The only person I paid any particular attention to was Varney. He is the herb hunter. He looked to me like he had had too much to drink and I was going to let him stay over a schedule and sober up but he had a through ticket and I didn't want to take the time to dig it out and change my reports. I had a carload of shorts, young folks going up to a party at one of the ski clubs and they were raising so much hell I figured the best thing was to get going and get rid of them as soon as possible. I shouldn't have had to take 'em but Reno didn't have an extra car so I was the goat."

"You don't know then just who was on the bus and who wasn't?"

"I know now. I checked the tickets but I didn't pay any attention to it then. I didn't know anybody was going to get murdered. Don't see why they had to pick my bus."

"What happened next?"

"Everybody piled out of the bus at Quarantine to have their baggage inspected and that is where Ryde got on. I think he must have come from Reno in a taxi or something."

"What makes you think that?"

"He had both rail and Pullman ticket. He must have intended taking the train and changed his mind in such a hurry he didn't have time to cancel his reservation or turn in his ticket for refund. I figured he found out somehow that Miss Fallon was on the bus and came hightailing after her. I took it to be love but maybe he discovered she owned a mine."

"Did he try to get you to take his rail ticket for passage at the Quarantine station?"

"He tried to get me to accept it but not at Quarantine. I never bother to take up tickets there. It is only four miles from Truckee where I have to make a stop and where I always pick up someone."

"Did you pick up someone?"

"A man by the name of Swan who turned out to be an ex-convict. There isn't any use suspecting him though, he couldn't possibly have switched flasks on me."

"What about the flasks?"

"That comes a lot later."

"All right, get on with your story."

"I CHECKED out of Truckee okay but when I got to the Summit the superintendent of highway maintenance flagged me to say Truckee had phoned

him that I had left a passenger behind."

"Had you?"

"No. Some honyock probably missed it and then put in a holler."

"Did you check your load?"

"Yes, and everybody had an identification stub except Varney."

"What happened to his?"

"He was just too dopey to find it. He had it at Reno for I remembered checking it. I told him I would put him off in the snow if I caught him taking a drink on the bus, and that is what saved his life."

"How?"

"Someone slipped him a flask of drugged liquor but he didn't dare take any of it. He must have given it to the woman. She drank it and died. At least that is the way I have it doped out."

"When did all this happen?"

"Must have been at the time we hit the slide. I had eleven passengers, twelve if you want to count a baby. All the others got off at the ski club."

"Was the slide man-made?"

"Not a chance. Someone just took advantage of it. After I hit the slide I backed up to give the road crew room to work and hit a boulder. It put the heating system out of commission and the bus began to get cold. Miss Fallon said she knew where there was a cabin that we could go to and make a fire. We transferred to it and it was then I found the body."

"Kyburz called my attention to her. He saw her feet sticking out in the aisle. There was a bottle of Old Atlas on the seat. I put this in my pocket. I looked through her purse and found out that her name was Dolly Pomins and that she had just got a divorce. I figured then that she had been celebrating and the booze was too much for her, maybe a weak heart."

"When we got to the cabin I put my

coat on the back of a chair to wash some diapers for the baby and when I got back somebody had switched flasks on me."

"How did you know they had switched flasks?"

"Because the bottle I had put in my coat pocket was Old Atlas and the bottle I found there was Black Bart. That is when I decided it was murder. I checked my load and found one man missing, Earl Swan. He is the ex-convict. He is on parole and was going down to the city to see a girl. He hadn't got permission to do this so was afraid he would be sent back to prison if he was caught, so started walking back. The superintendent of highway maintenance picked him up half-frozen and brought him back. He couldn't possibly have had anything to do with the switching of the flasks for he was on the road at the time it was done. He hadn't gone to the cabin with the rest and didn't even know where it was."

"You are sure of that. He isn't just trying to hoodwink you?"

DUSTY hesitated. "I'm not sure of anything, absolutely sure, but I am as sure about that as anything."

"Go on. What happened next?"

"While I was down looking for Swan, Lydia sent Varney down to get her overnight bag in the bus. Varney never got there. Someone strangled him at the foot of the stairs and hid his body behind the stairs."

"Could a woman do that?"

"Miss Fallon could. She looks plenty capable and besides Varney was still drunk. I gave him his bottle of Black Bart and he must have finished it off."

"About this mine now. How did you learn about that?"

"When Miss Fallon opened her overnight bag a piece of paper dropped to the floor. Rupert picked it up. He and

I were the only ones in the kitchen with Miss Fallon. He saw what it was and told her he was on his way to San Francisco to see her in regard to this very mine. He told her it had no gold whatever but that it was valuable because of this new metal, trithemium. What Miss Fallon wanted from her bag was a bottle of Old Atlas. It was an unopened bottle though. The seal was unbroken. She said a friend gave it to her."

"What was her friend's name?"

"I didn't ask."

"You can't clear up a murder without asking questions."

"I can't clear it up. You've got to get up here someday."

"I'll come up there just as soon as it is humanly possible but in the meantime you better do what you can or you may have another murder on your hands."

"What'll I do?"

"Start asking questions."

"What sort of questions?"

"Find out who Fallon's friend is. If the murderer didn't have much time to plan he may have used his own brand of liquor. Ask Rupert what his interest in the mine is. See if you can't learn if Ryde's interest in Fallon is of the heart or pocketbook variety. Ask Fallon why she invested in a mine. Who said it was good. Ask Kyburz a lot of questions. Anything you can think of and keep repeating them. If he is lying or trying to establish an alibi he may give you different answers the second or third time. Don't overlook Swan. Men who have run afoul of the law are prone to concoct elaborate alibis. Is that all of them on the bus?"

"There is a sailor, Cliff Canby, but he is just a kid. He has been home on leave and is now going to join his ship. He wouldn't kill anybody."

"What do you think he is in the navy for?"

"I mean anything like murder."

"Perhaps not, but it isn't safe to overlook anything. It is usually the least likely person who commits the murder. You haven't forgotten Ancy, have you?"

DUSTY hadn't forgot him. Ancy Murdoch had been one of his own pals but went gold crazy and ended up by killing people who got in his way. It had been during that period of trouble that Dusty had got acquainted with Blake. The F.B.I. man solved the mystery. One reason Dusty had so much faith in his ability to clear this up if he could only get here.

"The place to start is where you had your mix-up in tickets," Blake went on.

"Holy smoke! You don't want me to go clear back to the Summit?"

"No, that isn't at all necessary. What I mean is start your investigation with what happened there. When a train of incidents leads to murder you usually find they started with some little, seemingly inconsequential, misstep. A good many times murder could have been averted if that misstep had been caught in time."

"But those things happen every day," Dusty objected. "I've had passengers tear up their identification stubs, or give them to the baby to play with or even use 'em to stick their gum on."

"Yes, but you knew why they did those things. You made sure that everyone was properly ticketed before you took-off. This time you are not sure just what happened."

"Sure I am. Varney was drunk. A drunk is likely to do anything. He probably had his stub in his pockets somewhere. It might take him an hour to find it and I couldn't go looking through his pockets for him. Besides I knew he'd bought a ticket. He came right through from Lovelock. I have

had that happen before too."

"All the other times it turned out all right but this time it led to murder. You start investigating right there, make sure that is what happened before you do anything else. Don't guess. I'm not saying it had anything to do with the murder, but it is the first thing out of the ordinary run of affairs there-for it should be looked into first."

"Okay," Dusty agreed. "But you come up as soon as you can."

"I'll go down to the station and wait," Blake promised. "If you want to get in touch with me again call your dispatcher. I'll let him know where I am."

WHEN Dusty came out of the telephone booth he found the tavern keeper and his wife watching him anxiously. Luckily the tavern hadn't lost its heat yet and they both wore heavy woolen robes over their night clothes.

"Was anybody hurt?" the woman queried.

"What did you do? Have a wreck?" the man asked.

Dusty hesitated. "I ran into a slide and wrecked the heating system."

"Oh, the poor people," the woman said sympathetically. "They'll freeze to death. Can't you bring them up here?"

Dusty shook his head. "They'll be all right now. They are in a cabin with a good fire going."

"Anybody hurt?" the woman repeated.

"No," Dusty told her. "There is a couple not feeling so well."

"If you want to bring them up here we will do whatever we can," the woman offered.

"They will be all right," Dusty said. "I couldn't get them up here anyway."

"You can take our car if you want. It is in the garage. We don't use it

very much now with things the way they are."

Dusty shook his head. "Couldn't get anywhere in a car with the snow up over the wheels. I could never have got up here without snowshoes."

"It must be pretty cold out."

"Colder than blue blazes."

"Wouldn't you like a hot drink before you start back," the woman offered hospitably.

"I sure would."

"It won't take but a minute to make you a nice cup of coffee."

"I think I could stand a hot Tom and Jerry."

"Why Dusty Haven! You don't drink."

"The way things are going I think I need something stronger than coffee."

"What would your superintendent say? He'd fire you for drinking on duty."

"It will be a long time before he or anyone else can get up here and I've got a lot of disagreeable things to do."

The woman wagged her head doubtfully. "Of course, you know what you are doing."

"You go to bed, ma," the man said, "and I'll fix something up for him."

The woman left still shaking her head dubiously.

"I know what you want," her husband said, bringing out a bottle. "I used to be a lineman before I retired and bought this place."

HE FIXED up a couple of hot drinks and took one himself. Dusty left feeling warm and full of pep. The first mile didn't seem like anything but the effect of the liquor wore off then and it was twice as hard as coming up the hill. He wished he had brought a bottle along with him. He decided as soon as he got back to the cabin he would ask Lydia for a shot of Old Atlas. This

being a detective wasn't what it was cracked up to be. If he ran into any more murders he decided he would quit and go to fighting Japs whether they wanted him to stay on the job or not.

Driving a bus used to be fun. If you ran into grief you either got your tools out and fixed it yourself or you made your passengers comfortable and waited for a mechanic or tow car. Now you had to chase murderers down. You had to go round asking people all about their private lives. He wondered what Lydia would say when he asked her who gave her the whiskey and why? Why she bought a mine and what she intended doing with it? She would probably tell him to go to hell right off.

The moon was high over the mountains now making his lantern seem a feeble thing. Its silver beams painted a picture resembling a picture post card. Snow hung like cotton batten from every limb, shadows made each tree look like two, and shining dust had been sprinkled over everything. A night for lovers, skiers or painters. It was never meant for murder.

Dusty stopped at his bus for a few moments before going on up to the cabin. It was so covered with snow it resembled an oversized elephant that had lain down to die. He wished he could crawl inside and go to sleep; forget all about the passengers at the cabin. He didn't want to go up there and question them. The guilty person was sure to be the one with the best alibi. He was the last guy in the world to detect a phoney. He was the easiest driver on the whole system to stick with a hard luck story.

At the foot of the stairs he moved the box far enough to see that Varney's body had not been moved. Even Lydia's scarf still lay as he had placed it. Evidently the murder had not been discovered and the murderer felt he

was safe.

He took a deep breath, gritted his teeth and started up the stairs.

CHAPTER IV

Killer Unmasked

DUSTY opened the door to the living room and stepped inside. A swift glance showed that all of his passengers were present. The baby and its mother still asleep on the sofa. The soldier and his recently acquired bride were also dozing, wrapped in each other's arms. Swan, the ex-convict, was as close to the fire as he could get, still shivering. Ryde, Kyburz, Rupert and the sailor were playing cards with Lydia kibitzing. Dusty noted without surprise that money had replaced matches and that most of it was in front of Kyburz.

"Where have you been all this time?" Lydia demanded, starting to shout, then glancing at the sleepers and lowering her voice.

"Out," Dusty told her.

"Did you find the old man?" she whispered.

Dusty shook his head. He saw that the card game was suspended while the players stared at him. He tried to read their faces but couldn't see that any one of them looked more guilty than another. Kyburz's expression never changed. He might just be finding another body or dealing a straight flush.

"But where could he have gone? He'll freeze to death in this weather."

Dusty went into the kitchen and Lydia followed him. They had kept the fire going in the kitchen range, most likely for hot drinks, but it was now as warm there as in the living room.

"Do you happen to have one of those hot drinks left?" Dusty asked. He took off Rupert's coat and hung it on

a door knob. It was so heavy his shoulders were tired carrying it. He looked at his soaking shoes and thought about taking them off but decided it would be too hard to get them back on again and he might have to go somewhere very suddenly.

"Why you poor man," Lydia sympathized. "You look like you were chilled through. Sit right down by the stove and I'll fix you a drink in no time."

She went into the other room and came back with the bottle of Old Atlas. Dusty saw that most of it had been used.

"Who gave you that?" he asked trying to sound casual.

"A friend."

Lydia stopped her bustling long enough to look at him in surprise. "Why? What do you want to know for?"

"Oh, just curiosity."

"You know what happened to the curious cat?"

"I know what happened to someone else."

Lydia studied him thoughtfully. Dusty tried to grin but felt his face cracking. He didn't feel much like grinning.

"You're worried, aren't you?"

"Wouldn't you be if you'd lost a passenger?"

"It wasn't your fault."

"I'll get the blame."

"Don't you take it. I'll go right to your superintendent myself and tell him it wasn't your fault. It was my fault if it was anybody's. I asked him to go to the bus and get my bag."

DUSTY pointed to the liquor. "That is what you wanted, wasn't it?"

Lydia nodded. "And it is lucky for me you brought my bag up. I might never have found out about my mine."

"Mr. Rupert would have told you about it in San Francisco. He was going there expressly to see you."

"But what if I had sold it?"

"Why should you? You just bought it."

"Yes, but I didn't think it was such an awfully good thing, that is after I had a chance to think about it."

"What do you mean?"

"I was feeling pretty lucky when I bought it. Reno does things to you. I was winning right along at one of those gambling games and someone said I was so lucky I ought to buy a mine so I did."

"What made you think it might not be any good?"

"I don't know unless it was the reaction. When you do something on the spur of the moment you always wonder about it afterwards."

"Who told you to buy the mine?"

"A friend."

"Same one who gave you the bottle of Old Atlas?"

"Unhuh."

"What is Mr. Rupert's interest in it? Does he want to buy it?"

"Not particularly. He wants to buy the trith—trith—the stuff it produces. You use it in explosives. He is a manufacturer of explosives."

"How did he come to discover your mine had just what he wanted?"

"He was looking for it. He couldn't get enough of that trith—stuff so he went to Nevada to see if he couldn't find a mine that would have it. As soon as he found my mine had it he hurried right to Reno to see me about it. I certainly am lucky, aren't I?"

Dusty nodded. There was something phoney about the set-up but he couldn't put his finger on it.

"Where you won all that money gambling. The dealer wasn't Kyburz, was it?" He waved his hand toward the

other room. "One of those men in there playing cards?"

Lydia looked startled. "For heaven's sake. I wonder if it was?"

"Don't you remember?"

She shook her head. "No one ever looks at the man who deals cards in a gambling house, besides I was all excited and besides that I had had several drinks. I'll have to ask him. Wouldn't it be a coincidence if it was?"

Dusty thought it would be more like collusion than coincidence.

"Drink this," Lydia said, putting a hot drink in his hand.

Dusty sipped it and began to blame Varney less for getting stewed. He spread his feet and slipped down in his chair. He felt like dozing off, forgetting all about the murder, letting it go till Blake got here and took over.

Lydia put another chunk of wood on the fire. "It is real cozy here, isn't it?"

"Unhuh," Dusty agreed.

"I'm sorry about that old man but I can't imagine where he could have gone. Maybe he is all right though. He was dressed warm. He looks like a prospector. Maybe he knows how to take care of himself."

DUSTY sipped his drink slowly, said as casually as he could. "Where's your scarf?" He didn't think it sounded very casual for a picture of where her scarf was laying and Varney's crumpled body under the steps kept coming before his mind.

Lydia waved toward the living room. "In there. Why?"

"Nothing. I just wondered. It seemed to me just the thing to wear in this sort of weather."

"You take it if you have to go out again," Lydia offered. "It is just the thing to keep your ears from freezing."

"It is in the living room, you say?"

"Unhuh. On the back of one of the chairs, I think. I took it off as soon as we got the fire built."

Rupert came into the kitchen then.

"Game break up?" Lydia asked.

Rupert shook his head. "It broke me. Those fellows are just too good for my style of playing."

"You mean Kyburz is good?" Rocky said.

"Which one is he?"

"The fellow with the gimlet eyes and expressionless face."

"So that is his name. I wondered about him. He seems a peculiar chap, hardly says a word."

"Dusty says he is a gambler," Lydia broke in.

"Perhaps," Rupert admitted. "I can't see that he is any better player than the other two though. They are all too good for me."

Smart, Dusty thought. A gambler's trick to keep the other fellow thinking he was the better man. He'd rook them proper and they wouldn't find out he was a professional until later, or did Ryde know him? Swan had hinted as much. But if he did why was he playing with him. Were the two in cahoots?

"Rather lucky we had this trouble," Dusty remarked. "I mean for you two."

Rupert and Lydia exchanged glances. "It saved my looking her up when I got to San Francisco. If I had met her a little sooner it would have saved me this trip."

"It is certainly lucky for me," Lydia admitted. "I might not have had the mine by the time I got to San Francisco."

"What do you mean?" Rupert asked.

"I almost sold it."

"Almost sold it? To whom?"

"Cary," Lydia jerked her head toward the other room.

"You mean the man who was with

you on the bus?"

"Yes. Cary Ryde. It seems funny, doesn't it, to be so well acquainted and not know each other's names. It is being stranded like this. Seems like I must have known you all for a long time."

Dusty sat up straight. "Did he want to buy the mine?"

Lydia nodded. "He offered to."

"I should think he would."

"Oh, but he didn't know anything about—about—" She looked appealingly at Rupert. "That stuff, you know."

"Trithemium," Rupert supplied.

"I can't remember how to pronounce it ten minutes. Cary didn't know about that. Nobody knows it but you."

"Then what did he want the mine for?" Dusty demanded.

"He thought he ought to, I guess. He got me to buy it in the first place."

Dusty almost choked. "You mean he was the one who said you were so lucky you ought to buy a mine?"

Lydia nodded.

"Did he tell you to buy the Coronet?"

"Oh, no. He took me down to see a man who knows all about mines. He told me the Coronet was a good mine."

DUSTY felt confused. According to Swan, Ryde was supposed to be a mining broker. "What was his name?"

"Jerry Cotton."

Cotton was Ryde's partner according to Swan, Dusty recalled.

Rupert was nodding, "That is the fellow I went to see."

"You went to see him?" Dusty demanded. This was getting more and more complicated.

"Oh, yes. I learned in Lovelock that he owned the Coronet mine, so went to Reno to see him. He told me he had sold the mine to Miss Fallon and very kindly gave me her San Francisco ad-

dress. I bought a ticket on the first bus out and here we are."

"Is that all you did in Reno?" Dusty wanted to know.

Rupert felt his face. "I got a shave. I hadn't had one for several weeks."

"Did you tell this fellow Cotton why you were interested in the mine? Did you tell him it had trithemium and that it was valuable?"

"Surely. I was under the impression that he still owned it and wanted to get him to put it into production immediately. I offered him the same terms I am offering Miss Fallon."

"Miss Fallon says you are a manufacturer and you use trithemium in making explosives."

Rupert nodded. "I have a government contract and our stuff is needed on all the fighting fronts and needed badly." He looked at Lydia. "We can't possibly start too soon to get the mine going. Winter must not interfere. As soon as we get to San Francisco I hope you will go with me immediately."

"I'm willing," Lydia said. "I can't begin too soon to get rich." She patted Dusty on the cheek. "Just as soon as I can I'm going to throw a big party and you are invited."

Dusty didn't answer. He was busy trying to get things straight in his mind. He had a picture of Ryde coming hell bang for Lexington to catch the bus at Quarantine. Had he just found out about the mine? But he had got Lydia to buy the mine in the first place. Why was that? Was he trying to slip something over on his partner? Had he talked Lydia into buying the mine from his partner so he could buy it from her later? Was Kyburz mixed up in the deal some way? Lydia had money. Had those two got her all excited by letting her win money at the gambling table then got her to buy the mine expecting to get it back from her later? Ryde

was good looking, attractive, with the moon right he ought to be able to talk Lydia into anything. But why had Dolly Pomins and Varney killed and who did it? Was that Kyburz part of the bargain. He certainly appeared capable of it.

HE WAS staring at Rupert abstractedly as his thoughts churned furiously. It struck him that Swan had probably hit on the correct solution. The ex-convict had pointed out that Rupert and Varney were dressed alike and must have resembled each other greatly before Rupert had his whiskers shaved off.

"Did you shave off your whiskers before or after you went to see Cotton?" Dusty asked.

"After, of course," Rupert said. "I went to see him the minute I got in Reno."

That accounted for it; Dusty decided. Varney was killed because he resembled Rupert. They, either Ryde or Kyburz must have slipped Varney some doped whiskey. Most likely when they were getting ready to leave the bus and go to the cabin, or it could have been before they got on the bus, or at Quarantine. Everybody was milling around there while the border men inspected baggage. That was more like it. They slipped Varney the whiskey but he was afraid to touch it after he had bawled him out and threatened to put him out of the bus if he took a drink, so instead he had passed it to the woman. She drank it and died. And then one of them got Varney later. Which one? Dusty's thoughts must have shown on his face.

"What is the matter?" Lydia asked. "You look sick."

"I think I am," Dusty told her.

"Here," Lydia said, picking up the flask of Old Atlas. "Have some more

of this."

Dusty made a grimace. "Did Ryde give you that?"

Lydia nodded absently, she was busy pouring a drink.

"Does he know you are going to be a very rich woman?"

Lydia looked up surprised, glanced at Rupert. "Why, I never thought to tell him. Isn't that awful? I got so busy with that other poor fellow in there that it slipped my mind." She looked soberly at Dusty. "I am afraid he is going to get pneumonia. He's been shaking something awful."

Dusty got up and went into the other room.

A glance showed Lydia was right about Swan. He was right on top of the fire and still shaking. Dusty was more interested in Ryde and Kyburz. They were still playing cards with the sailor. Dusty sat down in the chair Rupert had vacated.

"Want to sit in?" the sailor asked eagerly.

Dusty shook his head. "I'll kibitz." He noticed with some surprise that while most of the money was in front of Kyburz the sailor wasn't doing so bad. Ryde was the big loser and he wasn't taking it very well. Perhaps he wasn't in cahoots with the gambler but again that could be part of the build-up. Ryde glowered at Dusty but said nothing. Kyburz after one keen look at Dusty turned his attention back to the cards. The sailor's luck was turning and he was highly elated. He nudged Dusty and leaned over to show him the cards he held.

He had good cards which surprised Dusty still more. Kyburz had dealt and Dusty was under the impression that the gambler could deal a person just about any card he wished. Was he giving good cards to the sailor on purpose? Perhaps he wasn't connected

with Ryde in any way. Perhaps he was after the mine on his own hook.

Dusty didn't think Ryde looked like a killer. He looked like a rich man's son who never had to worry about a thing in his life. Kyburz was different. Anything could be expected of him. If he ever came up before a jury they would convict him on his looks alone. His steel-blue eyes and expressionless features could make you shiver.

Dusty could imagine his handing Dolly a drugged drink without a quiver of an eyelash. He could strangle Varney and jam him behind the stairs without a second thought. He played cards like an automaton. He raised Ryde and shoved in a couple of bills without even looking up. There was a tension at the table. Dusty could feel it. It was something alive and definitely evil.

Dusty didn't think the sailor was in on it for he was too intent on his cards and too elated with winning. "More money than I make in a year," he crowed, pointing to the pile in front of him. "What I couldn't have done with all this jack on my trip home."

The tension, Dusty decided, must be between Kyburz and Ryde. The game must have a deeper significance than just winning money even if it was a lot of money. Perhaps Kyburz was allied with Ryde's partner, Cotton. Perhaps the game had something to do with murder. Which of these two had committed murder?

THE sailor took the pot and got the deal. As he picked up the cards Kyburz shoved across the table Dusty noted that the gambler had not even had openers, yet he had raised Ryde. Was he bluffing? As much money of his as Ryde's had gone to the sailor. Perhaps he wasn't as good a gambler as cracked up to be. Maybe his mind was on something else.

The sailor was shuffling the cards when Lydia and Rupert came in from the kitchen. Lydia gave Swan a hot drink she had fixed up and came over to stand behind Ryde and put her hands on his shoulders.

"What do you know, Cary," she said. "You were right about the mine."

"What do you mean?" Ryde asked, crossing his hands across his chest to place his hands over hers.

"The mine is rich," she enthused. "Its got thrith—thrith—" She looked over at Rupert.

"Trithemium," Rupert finished for her.

"That's fine," Ryde said. "What is it? Anything like measles?"

"No. Silly. It is metal. It is very valuable. It is going to make me a rich woman."

"That is wonderful. It is great. How did you find out?"

"Mr. Rupert told me. He discovered it." She turned to Rupert. "Mr. Rupert meet Mr. Ryde."

Dusty saw something come into Ryde's eyes, but, of course, it might just be jealousy.

Lydia looked at Kyburz. "Isn't it funny. It seems like I had known all of you all my life and yet I don't even know your name."

"Kyburz," the gambler said without change of expression. He did send a swift glance in Dusty's direction.

"Were you the dealer in that black jack game where I won so much?" Lydia asked. "Dusty said he thought you might be."

Kyburz nodded without even looking up. Ryde gave him a look that was anything but kind.

Lydia introduced them all around. "I'm going to give a party," she announced gaily, "and invite you all."

"I'll be at sea," the sailor said. "Tokio, I hope. I want to get another

crack at those skibbies."

"Have you been to sea before?" Dusty asked surprised.

The sailor was disgusted at the question. "I was at Pearl Harbor."

Ryde stood up and began putting what he had left in his pockets.

"You are not going to break up the game, are you?" the sailor asked.

"I'm through," Ryde growled, moving away.

"And just when I was getting good," the sailor groused.

Kyburz glanced at Dusty. "Better sit in. You're not going anywhere, are you?"

Dusty dropped into the chair Ryde had vacated. He felt in his pockets and found some change. "I'll play till that is gone."

THE sailor dealt and Dusty took the pot. He took several pots. Nevertheless he had a feeling that the cards were being manipulated. It was always just as he was on the verge of quitting that he took a pot. Chance or luck had nothing to do with this game. It was going exactly as someone wanted it to go, but, damn it, the sailor was winning.

"Whose cards are these?" Dusty asked.

"We found 'em in a drawer," the sailor said.

In spite of that Dusty felt the cards were marked. The cards could have been placed in a drawer to be conveniently found later or they could be marked in the course of the game. Experts do that easily. Make finger marks as they deal, turn a corner up slightly, prick them with an especially fashioned ring. Kyburz was wearing a ring. The sailor wasn't. The hell of it was that the sailor was winning and he didn't look like that sort of person.

Dusty studied the cards more closely

than he did his own playing. He knew he would find something and he did. A pin prick so small it would never be noticed by anyone not looking for it. Even then he had to let the hands go several rounds before he was certain of it. He noticed it first on the joker, next on an ace. He was absolutely sure now but how could the sailor mark them? He played with his hands in sight all the time. He had no ring, nothing that would make a mark like that. But he was doing the winning.

"What say we change it to stud?" Dusty suggested. He thought it might make a difference.

Kyburz gave him an expressionless glance and turned to the sailor. "All the same to me. The way you are breaking me I can only play a few hands more."

"Okay by me," the sailor agreed. "This is my lucky night."

When the deal got to Kyburz, Dusty knew that something was about to happen. The gambler's hole card was the joker and the sailor's an ace. Dusty knew it as well as if he were seeing them face up and he felt that the gambler knew he knew it. He looked at Dusty and if it were possible for his face to show any expression Dusty would swear he was wondering what he was going to do. The next card up was a king for Kyburz and another ace for the sailor. Dusty dropped out.

The sailor whooped joyously and shoved a handful of change to the center of the table. The sailor got a jack and the gambler a deuce. The sailor shoved in more money to be met by Kyburz. The sailor got another jack and Kyburz a king. The sailor started to pile his money in the center of the table but the gambler stopped him.

"This is all I've got but four bits to eat on in the morning."

"Okay," the sailor agreed. "This is

the last hand then."

"If you take it," Kyburz warmed.

"I'll take it," the sailor crowed. "This is my lucky night. I've never been this lucky since the skibbies missed me at Pearl Harbor."

DUSTY almost held his breath. He wondered what he would do. He was determined he would expose the gambler if it was the last thing he did. The gambler had the sailor absolutely at his mercy. He wouldn't be flat broke but he would have considerably less than when he started and all the money he had spent so much effort winning from Rupert and Ryde would be gone. It was a slick way of doing things. He'd helped the sailor strip the other two and now would take it all in one wild hand. Damn it, Dusty decided, he wouldn't let him get away with it. It didn't make any difference if the gambler did have a gun.

Kyburz slid another card over to the sailor. It was the third ace. The sailor stood up, sucked in his breath as if it was suddenly leaving him. "A full house," he gasped. "Three aces and a pair of jacks. Can you beat it?"

Dusty did hold his breath now. Kyburz held four of a kind. He couldn't mistake that joker and he had three kings in sight. Dusty half rose in his seat, staring at the gambler.

"Well," Kyburz drawled without the slightest change of expression. "I guess it is all yours."

"Wheel!" the sailor let out a whoop that woke even the baby. He began clawing at the money as if afraid it would run away. When Lydia came hurrying in from the kitchen he grabbed her arm and pointed. "It's all mine, all mine."

Dusty slipped back in his chair. He opened his mouth several times but nothing came out. He reached over and

picked up the hand Kyburz had discarded. He hadn't been mistaken. There were three kings and the joker. Four of a kind and it beats a full house any day.

He got up from his chair and found Kyburz still staring at him, still expressionless.

"What the hell," the gambler said defensively. "The kid is fighting our battle for us, ain't he. He was at Pearl Harbor."

The living room was in an uproar. The baby squalling. Its mother, not quite awake herself, trying to quiet it. The soldier and his bride wandering about sleepy-eyed, asking what had happened. Swan coughing. The sailor counting his money and trying to explain at the top of his voice what he was going to do with it. Lydia trying to be everywhere at once. It was several moments before it was quiet enough to hear.

"What in the world did you want to yell like that for?" Lydia demanded.

"Gee, lady, you don't understand," the sailor explained. "Look at what I won. Know what I'm going to do? I'm going to buy mom a whole new outfit. Everything new at once. She's never had that. New dress, new hat, new socks, new shoes, new skivvies, new everything. She never gets but one thing at a time and it never matches. Now she's going to get everything." He got his money together and shook it under Lydia's nose. "Look at it. More'n I ever had at one time in my life."

Lydia had to smile at his enthusiasm. "You're sure it isn't more than you ever had in your whole life."

The sailor took another curious look at his pile. "By golly, maybe you're right." He sat down and began to count it over again, paying not the slightest attention to anything going on

in the room.

The soldier yawned, stretched and turned to his wife. "Would you like a drink, dear?"

His wife looked about for the bathroom and departed for that.

KYBURZ went into the kitchen, picked up the flask of Old Atlas, sniffed it and set it down. He began to look through the cupboards. "I could do with a cup of hot milk," he said to Dusty who had followed him.

"Where's Ryde?" Dusty queried.

"He left when you sat down to play cards," Kyburz told him.

Dusty rushed out of the kitchen, through the living room and down the stairs. It was pitch dark in the garage. He couldn't see a thing. He felt for the big box. It had been pushed away from the foot of the stairs. He felt behind the stairs and found nothing. He searched his pockets for a match, lit it with trembling hands. Varney's body was gone.

He rushed back upstairs and put on his overcoat, grabbed the lantern. He noticed that Kyburz had disappeared. Rupert was watching him curiously.

"Look," Dusty shouted as a sudden thought struck him. "Wasn't Ryde and Kyburz playing cards with you all the while I was gone?"

Rupert nodded. "Except for a few moments."

"Except for a few moments?"

Rupert nodded. "Yes, I guess everybody left the game for a few moments at different times. Why?"

Dusty hurried out too fast to answer him.

Once outside the cabin Dusty saw that the moonlight made the lantern unnecessary and set it down on the floor of the garage. He had left the snowshoes right here but they were gone. He could see the tracks of the

snowshoes on the newly fallen snow leading away from the house and toward the bus. He followed them.

It was tough going. He hadn't gone fifty yards before he was wondering if he wouldn't save time by going back and trying to find another pair. Every other step he sank almost to his hips. First one foot then the other, sometimes both. Once in a while the snow would hold him up for half a dozen steps then he'd go down again. If he was at all sure he could locate another pair he would certainly go back.

By the time he reached the tree that looked like a man bending over he was wet with perspiration. He puffed and blew like a wind-sucking horse! So far he hadn't caught a glimpse of anyone, only the freshly-made marks of the snowshoes told he was on the trail. It must be Ryde and not Kyburz to get so far ahead of him.

He knew now why the herb hunter's body had been removed from under the steps. If the murderer could dispose of it, toss it in a canyon, hide it in deep snow, drop it in the swift-flowing river there would be no way of convicting him of the crime. No one could prove that the old fellow hadn't just wandered away and died of exposure. The same thing would apply to the dead woman in the bus. Probably why the murderer came this way. He would toss Varney's body in the stream then do the same to the woman. No one would ever be able to prove anything. Kyburz and Swan were the only ones who knew anything about Dolly Pomins. A gambler and an ex-convict.

AS HE came out of the canyon onto the highway he should have been able to see the murderer but he was nowhere in sight. He could see the bus, now completely covered with snow, and the trail of snowshoes that led around

the tree obstructing the highway and on to the bus. The fellow must be in the bus.

As he struggled around the end of the fallen tree he heard a shout.

"Hey, you blankety-blank fool. What are you trying to do?"

Dusty halted in amazement. It was the superintendent of highway maintenance's voice.

The reply was a shot. Its echo "pinged" from one side of the canyon to the other. Dusty ducked automatically.

"Why you blankety-blank-blank!" came the superintendent's voice, sounding madder than Donald Duck. "Drop that, I tell you. Drop it."

"Watch out!" came another voice and Dusty felt relief clear down to his gizzard. It was Rocky Blake's voice. Now things would get cleared up. The F.B.I. man would take over and his responsibilities would be ended.

Dusty scrambled, slid, fell, thrashed about like he was swimming, arms and legs working furiously until he got to the edge of the highway where he could look down the hill and see what was happening.

What he saw nearly knocked him silly.

Halfway down the hill was the superintendent of highway maintenance on his back in the snow and kicking wildly. He resembled a gigantic bug that couldn't turn itself over. He had on snowshoes and must have been following the murderer. He'd jumped to avoid the shot and landed on his back. He was cursing a blue streak.

A short distance from the superintendent was Rocky Blake. He was wearing snowshoes also and went swiftly to the aid of the cursing superintendent. Halfway down the hill was the murderer, carrying the dead herb hunter on his shoulders like a sack of

flour. He had on the snowshoes that Dusty had left at the door of the garage. Their trail showed the route he'd taken around the bus and down the hill. Blake and the superintendent must have been in the bus and saw him as he circled the bus. His purpose was easily guessed. He meant to toss the inert body into the swift-flowing stream at the bottom of the hill. It wouldn't be found for months and then unrecognizable.

Dusty yelled at him.

He turned to stare up at Dusty, his face so contorted with rage that Dusty couldn't tell who it was. He let the dead man slip from his shoulder and raised his gun to fire at Dusty.

Dusty dodged and fell flat as the superintendent had done. The bullet whizzed over his head and he burrowed into the snow. When he peeked over the top of his burrow the fellow had grasped the dead man's arm and with single-mindedness of the insane was dragging him toward the river. Dusty glanced at Rocky.

The F.B.I. man had his gun trained on the murderer but was hesitating to use it until the last possible minute.

"Don't shoot," Dusty shouted. "We'll get him yet." He threw off his coat and started rolling up a ball of snow. If he could get it big enough and start it rolling down hill it would pick up everything in sight, leaving a clear path right down to the river. They could grab the killer before he could get rid of his victim.

He patted the ball together, rolled it round and round as fast as he could move. He was perspiring profusely, panting loudly and his knees knocked. He got it to the edge of the road and shoved it over with a mighty grunt.

IT MADE a path all right. It picked up everything to the bare ground.

The farther it went the bigger it grew and the bigger it grew the faster it went. It roared down the hill like a forest fire. Rocky had to make a mighty leap to get out of the way. The edge of it hit the superintendent and sent him sprawling again. Sprawling and cursing.

The murderer saw it coming, cursed loudly and let go of the body to get out of the way. It didn't do any good. A rock or something turned the ball of snow now bigger than an elephant and before Rocky could cry out hit the killer and knocked him screaming into the stream.

It was the murderer's body and not his victim's that went hurtling among the rocks of the wild mountain stream.

Rocky helped the squirming superintendent up again and retrieved the body of the herb hunter. They took it to the bus and laid it out on the back seat where the other one was. Dusty sank into a seat with a sigh. Rocky lit a cigarette.

"Who was he?" he asked Dusty jerking his head toward the spot where the murderer had disappeared.

Dusty shook his head. "I'm not sure."

"You're not sure?" Both Rocky and the superintendent shouted.

"I think it is Ryde but I am afraid it is Kyburz."

"You're afraid it is Kyburz?"

"I don't want it to be Kyburz—not after the way he acted but he is the sort who could do that. He had a gun. He could have killed Ryde, taken his hat and coat. He told me Ryde had beat it and then in just a couple of seconds he had disappeared himself."

"But you saw him when he shot at you."

"I couldn't be sure," Dusty groaned. "His face was all screwed up and I ducked so fast."

Rocky blew out a cloud of smoke. "Suppose you start at the beginning and tell us all about it."

"Kyburz is a gambler," Dusty began.

"I know," Rocky nodded. "I've been doing some investigating myself since you telephoned. Kyburz is one of the best gamblers in the business. He ran a black jack game but quit it to join the navy. The navy wouldn't have him so he tried the army and got turned down also. Perhaps he went haywire."

"What about the other guy?" the superintendent asked.

"Ryde is a confidence man. He and his partner pose as mining men to sell worthless stock to the divorce colony. Women usually. Ryde is a playboy who knows all about women especially those who have recently traded a husband for a good sized alimony check."

"He sold Lydia, Miss Fallon, a mine," Dusty broke in. "It turned out to be rich though."

"How come?" the superintendent wanted to know.

"A fellow by the name of Rupert found trithemium on it," Rocky explained. "It is something new. The mine is worthless except for that."

The superintendent nodded toward the river. "Then that must have been Ryde."

"But Kyburz was at the black jack table," Dusty objected. "He could have been in cahoots with Ryde. He may have let Lydia win so she would feel rich and invest in a mine."

"How come they were all on the same bus?"

"Lydia was going home," Dusty explained. "Rupert was going there to see her about the mine. Cotton had told him about her buying it. He must have told Ryde and maybe Kyburz that the mine was rich and they wanted to stop Rupert from seeing her until

they could get the mine back. Rupert and Varney were dressed alike in outdoor clothes, sheepskin coats and high boots, that is why the killer got mixed up. Rupert had whiskers just like Varney's when he called on Cotton but he shaved them off before he got on the bus."

"What about the woman?" the superintendent demanded.

"I bawled Varney out for drinking so he was afraid to take any more," Dusty explained. "He must have passed the liquor on to her. It was doped."

"How did he get the poisoned liquor?"

"Someone switched bottles. He bought a bottle of Black Bart at Reno and had it in his coat pocket. The poisoned liquor was Old Atlas. I found the bottle on the bus seat and put it in my pocket. The murderer found out I had it and switched back again, taking the poisoned liquor and putting the bottle of Black Bart in its place. That is how I knew it was murder."

"It was this guy who got murdered that didn't have a ticket when you

checked your load at the Summit, wasn't it?" the superintendent asked.

DUSTY nodded and sat up suddenly.

"Say, the murderer must have swiped his ticket in hopes I wouldn't let him ride without it. Golly, I should have put him off. It might have saved two lives."

"What I can't get," the superintendent growled, scratching his head, "is which one is the murderer. Ryde or Kyburz. Who went whirling down that river?"

"Ryde," Rocky explained. "Don't you see. He talked Lydia into buying a worthless mine then when his partner told him it was valuable he started out to get it back. He bought a rail ticket but discovered she had taken a bus. He must have hired a taxi to take him to Quarantine station where he caught the bus. It was probably right there that he stole the herb hunter's ticket and switched a poisoned bottle of liquor for the one the man had in his pocket. As Dusty said, he had Varney tagged as Rupert and didn't discover his mistake until it was too late. He tried then to get rid of the bodies but Dusty was too hot on his trail."

"You are absolutely sure it was Ryde?"

"Yes," Dusty put in. "Here comes Kyburz now."

The gambler must have found another pair of snowshoes for he came along swiftly to the bus. He pulled open the door and looked in. His expression never changed a bit as he caught sight of the three of them watching him silently.

"Where were you going on the bus?" Rocky asked him finally.

"The army," the gambler explained, "has changed its mind."

THE END



OFF THE BLOTTER

(Concluded from page 47)

THE use of fingerprints instead of a signature on wills, deeds, and other documents requiring a signature is increasing in this country at a rather alarming rate. These fingerprints are accepted as bona fide signatures even though the prints might have been made while the signer was drunk, insane, unconscious, or even dead.

ACCORDING to Paul V. McNutt, eighty percent of the persons placed on probation make good. He claims that no other crime preventative can boast of such a high percentage of success.

J. EDGAR HOOVER tells us that in 1941 there were more boys arrested who were nineteen years of age than in any other age group. The eighteen year olds were close on their heels, however, for top "honors." When one takes into consideration the fact that the average loot for burglaries in 1941 was only \$60.56 per offense, it is hard to believe that boys so young will risk their whole future life for such a small return.

HERE'S a crime superstition which would simplify the prosecutor's job, if it were true: In past ages, it was a widespread notion that when a killer was brought to gaze upon the body of his victim, the murdered man's wounds would begin to bleed anew!

SPEAKING of "the olden times" we have a modern procedure which isn't exactly new. In case you didn't know it, the third degree is quite an ancient institution. It comes from medieval times. Roman Law, in its spread through Europe, set up the requirement that before a criminal could be sentenced for a misdeed, it was necessary to secure testimony of his guilt, preferably from the criminal himself. So, to get a confession, crook-catchers devised gadgets against obstinacy. Little devices for persuasion like racks and thumb-screws and tongue-tearers and bone-crushers. Their third degree method often was far worse than the punishment the crook got after he was convicted. Off-hand, there seems to be a catch to the medieval third-degree: How could any innocent suspect help but confess to a crime he didn't do, under the torture of being hung up by the thumbs while weights were tied to his legs?

IT'S legal to resist a cop . . . in Texas. But not very advisable. Texas has a statute—a somnolent one—which provides that an arrest made by a policeman without proper foundation in fact constitutes "an unlawful assault, which the person he is attempting to arrest may repel and defend himself against."

LET'S look at the future; imagine future "racketeers." Television is a commonplace: every home has it. A racket mob is "putting the bite" on television broadcasters. They "jam" the program. You are tuned in on a great opera star, pouring out the beauty of *Tannhauser*. Ah—raptly in your receiver, over the opera star, appears a barnyard scene—pigs' stuffing swill: and over the music blares the grunt and slush of swine, neigh of horse, bray of jackass, all being illegally broadcasted on the same wavelength as the legitimate program. Let's hope not!

THE gyp barber shop was an early bloomer. A half-century ago in the West, a favorite gag was to have two price lists. A stranger coming uncurried and uncombed into one of these handitonsoriums, would look at the list displayed so eye-fillingly plain on the wall, would note the modest charges, and relax in a chair for a haircut. He would get a hair-cut—also a shine, shave, shampoo and practically everything else on the snippers' repertoire. And while he was two fathoms deep in the soapsuds of the shampoo, that price list there on the wall would be turned over, showing its baser side. At last the customer would sit up, shining and resplendent of pate and jowl. Grandly he would reach for his money—and a bill for ten to twenty dollars would be thrust at him. If he was too stunned to protest, he was lucky. For if he raised a howl to Heaven, barbers fell on him from every side. The money demanded would be taken off him, and he would be heaved out into the gutter as fervently and as righteously as if he had tried to pass a lead half-dollar on the barber.

Nor is that all. If, while being snipped and perfumed, he had let the barber guess that he had a sizeable bank roll on him, the barber would "nick" him. That is, the barber would scissor a small notch in his hair, above the collar at the back. This would be a high sign to the prowling bunco steers that here was a sheep to be shorn!

LARGE banks at times suffer from minor thefts on the part of some employee. One bank in Chicago, in an effort to trace a theft of several thousands of dollars, brought in a "lie-detector" and subjected some fifty of their employees to the polygraph test. The guilty man was discovered. That wasn't all that was discovered, however. Nine other employees confessed to minor thefts!

WHICH brings us to the last inkspot on the "Blotter" this month. Maybe next issue we can apply the mirror and decipher a few more interesting things for you. Meanwhile, we're digging out the sweetest lot of stories you ever read. Don't fail to be with us when we dish it out. Until then, our condolences (ha!) to the Japs and Nazis. Rap.

ALIBI IN

by ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM

Nosey Logan had a peach of an alibi; so perfect it was foolproof. But if he'd been without one, he'd have been safer!

THE MERE act of ringing Pop Conway's doorbell that night made Jarnegan of the homicide division feel like a louse. Ever since Jarnegan's rookie days Pop had been his mentor and friend, helping him over the rough spots, teaching him the job of being a good copper. It was tough to be calling on the old man now on a mission like this one.

Jarnegan thumbed the bell push again, wondering why it took so long to get an answer. Pop was probably puttering around with the sound recording gadgets that had become his hobby in retirement, the homicide dick concluded. Frowning, he rang a third time.

The door opened and Pop Conway blinked out at him, looking a lot older now that he was off the force.

"Tim, my boy! It's good to see you. Come in."

Jarnegan walked into a living room littered with microphones, record players, electrical stuff. His frown deepened. Much of this equipment had belonged to Pop's only son, an expert until his death in an auto accident a few years back. For Pop to be using

it now seemed almost morbid, Jarnegan thought.

Pop peered at him.

"Why the scowl, Tim? What's eating you?"

"Nothing much," Jarnegan lied. Plenty was eating him. "Did you hear the news broadcast tonight?"

"No. Anything important on it?"

Jarnegan squared his shoulders.

"Look, Pop. This is screwy, but I've got some questions to ask you."

"Fire away."

"Do you remember a cheap crook named Nosey Logan that used to be mixed up with Ace Cullane's gambling syndicate?"

"Sure I remember," Pop said. "We sent him up for three years on a bunko rap. It was Ace Cullane, the guy he worked for, whose testimony nailed the lid on him. We figured it was another case of thieves falling out—a big one feeding a little one to the wolves."

"Yeh. And remember how Logan threatened to get even with Ace Cullane some day. Yelled it right out in the courtroom."

"Well?"

"Well, Nosey Logan was released

REVERSE



The expression of alarm in Pop's eyes came too late to warn him . . .

from stir this morning. And tonight we found Ace Cullane bumped off in one of his hideaway apartments. A neighbor phoned in the beef, described a guy he saw coming out of Cullane's flat. The description fits Logan so we picked him up on suspicion."

"And—?"

Jarnegan blurted out the words that were festering inside him.

"Logan is trying to use you for an alibi, Pop. He says he was here with you all evening. Ever hear anything so damned crazy?"

"Not crazy, Tim. True."

Jarnegan stared. He felt his neck swelling, making his collar too tight.

"I don't believe it. You wouldn't have any truck with a wrong guy like Nosey Logan. You wouldn't even let him in your house. Why should you be fronting for the heel?"

Pop Conway smiled softly.

"If anybody but you called me a liar, Tim, he'd get a poke on the horn. I tell you Logan was here at the time of the kill. He was nowhere near the scene of the killing.

"You're sticking to it, then?"

"I'm sticking to it."

Jarnegan sighed.

"Let's go to headquarters. Maybe they'll fall for it. I don't."

Pop was staring past him, looking startled. A warning came to his lips but Jarnegan never heard it. Somebody slugged the homicide detective over the back of the skull with a black-jack. He went down like a chopped tree.

THE ROOM looked like the aftermath of havoc when Tim Jarnegan woke up. Pop Conway wasn't there. Wherever he had gone, though, it had not been willingly. Jarnegan knew this from the evidence of the struggle Pop had made. Furniture was over-

turned, electrical apparatus scattered, a stack of records smashed. About the only piece of unbroken equipment was a box-like contraption over in a far corner, near the telephone.

Jarnegan made for the phone, his legs unsteady, his head throbbing. Pop had been kidnaped, he realized, but he was too groggy to figure out a possible motive; too dazed to link it with the Ace Cullane kill and Nosey Logan's alibi. All he thought about was the old man's present danger. Headquarters had to be notified.

He lifted the phone out of its cradle. This caused a subdued hum to issue from the nearby box-like contraption, together with a faint scratchy sound. Restoring the telephone to its prongs stopped these noises.

Puzzled, Jarnegan opened the hinged lid of the box and saw a turntable with a grooved metal record-blank on it. A swivel arm projected over the record, its diaphragm and cutting needle resting in a groove halfway toward the center label. Wires ran down inside the box, vanished there.

The outfit was electrically connected to the telephone in such a way that its machinery functioned only when the circuit was in use. By picking up the phone you started the turntable revolving and your conversation was recorded on the blank metal disc. Jarnegan proved this to his own satisfaction after he got through calling in his report to headquarters. He located the playback pickup, set the needle in its groove, started the mechanism. From a concealed loudspeaker came his own voice repeating what he had just said to the desk sergeant downtown.

Beyond doubt the device was just another ramification of Pop Conway's hobby, a toy to be tinkered with. Now Pop had been snatched, you might say in the very act of supplying an alibi

for Nosey Logan. For the first time, Jarnegan began to wonder if the kidnaping had a connection with that alibi.

ON AN idle hunch, he decided to play back the entire record on the turntable to find out what telephone conversations Pop might have had during the day. The first few that came out of the loudspeaker were common place, desultory. Then this mechanical eavesdropper began repeating something that made Jarnegan go tense.

There was Pop's voice to begin with, as if answering somebody's call.

"Hello, Conway speaking."

"Yeah? Well, listen, copper. This is Nosey Logan. Maybe you remember me. I'm just outa stir, see? I was sent up—"

"Yes, Logan," Pop's voice interrupted. "I remember you."

"Okay. Now get this. I'm gunnin' for Ace Cullane, see? He ratted on me three years ago, an' tonight I'm gonna get even. But the law ain't gonna touch me for it afterward on account of you're gonna be my alibi."

Amazement knifed into Pop's reproduced voice.

"Are you crazy?"

"Naw. I said you're gonna alibi me an' I mean it. Unless you'd sooner have me spill the dirt about your son. Sure I know he's dead now. But it wouldn't do his memory no good if I was to tell the way he sold wire-tappin' outfits to the bookie syndicates."

"Wire-tapping?"

"Yeah, gadgets that you could cut in on telegraph trunk lines so the sure thing boys get horse race results ahead o' time an' clean up on sucker bets."

"My son made and sold outfits like that? To crooks?"

"You heard me. And while you was a cop, too. So how about it? You

gonna front for me if I need you, or do I shoot off my yap?"

"I suppose I'll front for you," Pop Conway's voice sounded far-off, weary. "For my son's sake. For the sake of his memory."

"Swell. In case anything comes up, you say I was with you all evenin', see? And don't make no slips." The conversation ended with scratchy silence on the metal record.

JARNEGAN'S HEART was hammering as he stopped the turntable. Now he had the riddle's answer. He knew why Pop had tried to alibi Nosey Logan. The poor old guy had been blackmailed into it, on pain of having his dead son's misdeeds exposed. This discovery led Jarnegan's thoughts into still other channels more closely connected with Pop's kidnaping. He had a hunch about that, too.

Headache forgotten, he sprinted outdoors to his car and aimed it downtown. At Central Precinct he ordered Nosey Logan brought to him from the detention tank to the goldfish room.

Logan swaggered in, a sallow little rat with a certain rodent bravado.

"Hi, shamus. You check my alibi?"

"I checked your alibi," Jarnegan admitted, not mentioning the recorded shakedown conversation whereby Logan had blackmailed Pop Conway into furnishing it.

"Conway clear me?"

"He said you were with him."

"Then how's about turnin' me loose?"

"Not until I ask you something. Who's your worst enemy now that Ace Cullane has been croaked?"

Logan made a puzzled mouth.

"I don't get you."

"I mean somebody who hates your guts so much he wants you to go to the chair for bumping Cullane."

"But I didn't bump Cullane! I—"

Jarnegan nodded patiently.

"Sure, sure. Pop Conway is your alibi. But he's been snatched."

"What?"

"Yeh. And without Pop's testimony you can't beat the rap. That's obvious. And I think it explains Pop being kidnaped—so he won't be on deck to front for you. Whoever grabbed him is trying to slip you a ticket to the hot squat, Nosey."

"Gawd!"

"So you see why I asked you about your enemies. Who hates you enough to want you fried?"

Logan made gulping sounds in his throat.

"Dice Vallardo—he's the only one! You know him?"

"I know Vallardo. He's been teamed up with Cullane in the rackets quite a while. You think he packs a grudge against you?"

"Damn' right! I crossed him one time. So he got Cullane to go in court an' spill enough to send me up the river. Vallardo did it. He was behind the stretch I got."

Jarnegan nodded.

"It makes sense. And now you think Vallardo heard the news broadcast about you using Pop Conway for an alibi—and he had Pop snatched."

"Yeah. Look. Even if Vallardo knows I didn't croak Cullane, he wants to frame me for it. That keeps *him* in the clear, see?"

"Are you accusing Vallardo of the kill?" Jarnegan asked.

"Well, he'll take over all the rackets now that Ace is dead. He won't have no partner to share the dough with."

Jarnegan's handcuffs glittered out of his pocket. He snapped them on Logan's wrists.

"Come along. We'll go see Vallardo right now. If he's got Pop Conway,

God help him."

The little crook went pasty.

"Ix-nay, copper! I ain't goin' anywheres near Dice Vallardo. Especially with bracelets on. You think I wanna get my kidneys kicked out?"

"I'll kick your kidneys out myself if you don't get moving," Jarnegan said. He yanked his prisoner out to the street and pointed to his car. "In. Fast."

Nosey Logan got in, trembling.

THE PENTHOUSE apartment on the roof of the San Marcal Hotel rented for thirty-five thousand a year. Dice Vallardo paid this out of his small change pocket and had enough left over for gold tipped cigarettes. He was smoking one of the cigarettes in a long ivory holder when Jarnegan marched in with Logan. He put the cigarette down and his hand went surreptitiously toward a desk drawer.

Jarnegan shook his head.

"If you've got a gun in there, better let it alone. Mine's already out." He displayed the snub-nosed .32 special in his fist.

"Have it your way, copper," Vallardo said smoothly. His voice matched his hair, sleek and oily. Sun lamps gave him a healthy tan the year around. He cast a flickering glance at Nosey Logan. "Hello, skunk."

Logan didn't answer. Tim Jarnegan pitched his own tone to a conversation level.

"Where's Pop Conway? I want him. Now."

"What makes you think you'll find him here, copper?"

"A hunch. You snatched him to keep him from giving this Logan louse an alibi."

Vallardo smiled politely.

"You'll have a terrific time proving that, pal."

"I don't need to. I'll just tell you that you haven't any valid reason to hold Pop. He won't alibi Logan, after all."

Nosey Logan let out a yelp and brandished his handcuffs.

"Like hell Pop won't alibi me! You already said—"

"Forget what I said," Jarnegan growled. "You blackmailed him into fronting for you. You phoned him, threatened to expose his dead son's connection with the gambling syndicate's wire-tapping gadget. He was forced to agree to anything you wanted. But he made a record of your telephone conversation and I've listened to that record. If necessary I'll play it in court—and Pop's testimony will be branded as prejury."

Logan's sob rose to an animal whine.

"But I didn't bump Ace Cullane! I went to his joint, yeah—but he was dead when I got to him. Somebody made the grade ahead of me. It was Vallardo, here! *He* wanted Cullane's rackets—" All of a sudden the man-aced little crook sprang at Dice Vallardo.

Jarnegan picked up a chair, hefted it. He yelled:

"Look out, Vallardo! Get him!"

Vallardo opened his desk drawer and came up with an automatic. He fired point blank. He got Nosey Logan through the heart. He looked at Logan's corpse, and then he looked at Jarnegan.

"That finished him copper."

"It finished you, too," Jarnegan said, and hit Vallardo with the chair. It was an extremely heavy chair. This was very tough on Vallardo. He had a soft skull, anyhow.

JARNEGAN walked out of the room and started prowling the rest of the penthouse apartment. He found Pop

Conway trussed and gaged in a rear bedroom. He cut the ropes and removed the gag.

"You okay, Pop?"

"Yes. I'm okay. But I—I heard a shot just now, Tim. I—what happened?"

"Vallardo killed Nosey Logan when Nosey accused him of the Cullane croaking. So I guess the accusation was a bull's eye. Anyway, I'll put it down on my report. And Vallardo won't beef. He's dead too. I hit him harder then I thought. Jarnegan made a sour mouth. They're all dead—Cullane, Logan, Vallardo. That closes the case. It just about wipes out the gambling syndicate, too. Which is a good thing."

"But look, Tim," Pop said slowly. "Suppose you're wrong. Suppose Vallardo was innocent of the Cullane kill?"

Jarnegan's eyes held a queer look.

"Then he just got paid off for shooting Nosey Logan, is all. What do you care?"

Pop Conway tried to say something. The words seemed to stick in his throat. "I—I—"

"So all right," Jarnegan said. "So you had a kid you thought the world of. He got messed up with a bunch of crooks, Cullane and Vallardo and their mob. He made wire-tapping gadgets for them. Later he died in an auto accident, only it wasn't an accident. It was deliberate. Cullane and Vallardo had him knocked off, maybe because he had become dangerous to them or wanted to go straight.

"You always suspected his death wasn't an accident but you didn't have any way of proving it so you kept quiet. Then, today, Nosey Logan phoned you and blackmailed you for an alibi he thought he was going to need.

"He talked just enough to make you

sure your kid had been murdered by Cullane and Vallardo. You still couldn't prove it in court, so you took the law in your own hands. You went to Cullane's hideout apartment and browned him before Logan could do the job. Then you gave Logan an alibi because it would also be an alibi for your self. Later, Vallardo had you kidnapped. You permitted this, because you thought it might give you a chance to get Vallardo too. Only I got him first."

Pop looked very old and very tired. "I made a good cop of you, Tim. You've got it right. All of it. What are you going to do about it?"

"Me?" Jarnegan raised an eyebrow. "Why, hell. A bunch of heels have got their just deserts. I'm not going to do anything about it— except take you home. I told you this case is closed. What chance would I have to prove any of this in court?"

—The End —

THE MAN NO JAIL COULD HOLD

By A. MORRIS

THE career of Jack Sheppard has been the subject of novels, novelettes, and folk tales for many years in England for it was a truly remarkable one to say the least.

He was born in Stepney, England, in 1702, the son of a carpenter. His father earned a rather nice income for those days and thus Jack was given a liberal education in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Perhaps Jack was a little wild, but nevertheless a typical English lad. He was fair complexioned with sharp features, dark, laughing eyes, a small head, a slim, agile body.

When Jack Sheppard was fifteen years old his father apprenticed him to Owen Wood, a carpenter, who did work for W. Kneebone, a merchant. Mr. Kneebone took a liking to Jack and taught him how to keep accounts and general clerical work.

With that start in life Jack might have become a great merchant or an expert carpenter—if he hadn't met Joseph Hind, who was destined to start Jack on his life of crime. Joseph Hind, who was a button mould maker, liked his liquor and taught Jack the "fine" art of drinking. He also introduced him to Elizabeth Lyon, known as Edgworth Bess, who became Jack's first mistress. From this shady pair, Jack learned how to steal, at first small things and then the big things. When Mr. Wood, his master, became suspicious of him, Jack broke his apprenticeship and set up lodging at Parson's Green with Edgworth Bess.

Thus started the "official" career of Jack Sheppard. He joined up with Blueskin, a famous thief of his day, and the partnership was a great success. Their favorite method was to burglarize the shops of London, but on one occasion they became highwaymen and robbed a traveler.

Soon after Bess was captured with a large amount of the stolen goods and was taken to St.

Giles' Roundhouse.* When Jack learned of this, he went to the jail and started a conversation with the jailer. Not knowing Jack's identity, the jailer was caught unprepared when Jack knocked him out, took his keys, and freed Bess.

At about this time, Jack changed his partners and took in his brother Tom. Tom didn't have Jack's skill and was soon caught. He also lacked Jack's "code of honor" and "stooled" on Jack and Bess in return for a promise of leniency. Jack eluded the police for a few days but was finally captured and taken off to jail.

He was put into a cell in the upper story of the jail. His only tool was an old razor, but he more than made up for this with his brains. Taking his mattress from its bed and putting it into the middle of the room, he began to cut a hole in the roof with his razor. No one could hear him since the pieces of roof fell noiselessly on the mattress. All was going well, until one of the roof tiles fell outside the jail instead of on the mattress. It struck a man on the head as he walked by and when he saw what had caused the tile to fall, he called the jailers. Jack, realizing his discovery was so near, gave a final push on the roof, showering the crowd that had gathered with tiles. Through the hole he scrambled onto the roof. It was then an easy matter for Jack to jump the two stories to the ground and over the surrounding wall before the guards came. He then joined the crowd and helped them as they shouted to the guards the direction the culprit had taken.

It was not long before the law again caught up with Jack, this time as he was picking pockets, and he was hustled off to St. Ann's Roundhouse. When Bess came to visit him, she was also ar-

* Roundhouse—A small English jail.

rested on suspicion. When he heard that the magistrate intended to send them both to Newgate Prison, the strongest in all London, Jack got a little panicky. He promised to confess all of his thefts as well as those of his friends and so the magistrate sent him to New Prison for the night where both Bess and he were put into the strongest cell. This was exactly what Jack wanted since he had no intention of confessing to anything.

His escape was not as easy as before since New Prison was stronger than a Roundhouse and he also had Bess to consider, who couldn't perform all of his tricks with him. After much work, he finally got two bars loose from the window and made a ladder from the blankets in the cell. Bess couldn't squeeze through the narrow opening with all her clothes on and so Jack ordered her to strip completely. When they reached the ground, Bess dressed and by some means they got over the prison wall. This escape established Jack's reputation as a prison-breaker.

The greatest test of his skill as an escape artist came when Jack was again caught. This time he was accused of robbing his old employer, Mr. Kneebone, and was convicted and sentenced to death. He was sent to the "Condemned Hole" at Newgate to await the arrival of his "Dead Warrant."

Newgate was considered escape proof because of its huge, thick walls, elaborate doors, and barriers upon barriers. Like most jails at that time, it was filthy and unsanitary. Corruption was everywhere and with money a prisoner could by good food and drink, see his friends, and lead a rather merry life. Without money, the prisoner was underfed and usually died of jail fever. Men and women were put together and sexual atrocities were common.

The Condemned Hole was situated for greatest safety in the Lodge of Newgate. The cell was underground, dark, foul, and overcrowded. There was a dark passage with some steps to a door where prisoners were permitted to go to talk to visitors. The door was huge and massive and heavily locked. At the top were spikes and all the prisoner could do was stick his head up between the spikes to see and talk to his friends.

One of the prisoners, named Davis, who had become acquainted with Jack was about to be executed. Before he was taken from the cell, Davis slipped Jack a file with which he cut one of the spikes until it could be broken away by hand. On the day of Jack's execution, Bess and a number of his friends came to say goodbye. They clustered about the entrance while the guards were upstairs drinking. Jack snapped the spike and with Bess pulling and a fellow-prisoner pushing, he was soon through the opening. When the visitors left, Jack was safely in the middle.

When the escape was discovered, the officials were stunned to hear that a prisoner had done the "impossible" but surprise was soon replaced

by anger and the best men were sent after Sheppard.

JACK laid low for a time at Warnden in Northamptonshire with a friend, but the inactivity proved too boring for such a restless fellow and so he returned to London and his thieving. The police picked up his trail and he soon had to leave for Finchley and later the fields. Someone betrayed his hiding place to Austin, Chief of the prison officials, and he was soon returned to Newgate.

This time the officials were taking no chances with Jack. He was kept in the prison's strongest room, named the Castle. His legs were chained together, he was covered with heavy irons, and stapled to the floor. Moreover, a guard kept a constant watch by day and he was locked in during the night. The jailers remembered all the humiliation Jack had caused them and so they freely showed him off to all visitors as he lay there chained and forlorn.

But Jack had not given up hope of escape and he kept the guards forever on their toes. One day a guard became suspicious when Jack kept reading the Bible all the time. When the Bible was examined, it was found to contain a file. Four days later, a guard happened to pass his hand over the seat of the rush-bottom chair on which Jack sat and found two files, a chisel and a hammer. After this he was without tools, but within a short time the guards saw evidence that he was moving about the room beyond the limits of his chain. He had found a loose nail in the floor, removed it, and bent it. With this nail he had picked the padlock chaining him to the floor and set himself free. To prevent this from happening again, he was handcuffed as he went against this injustice.

Jack knew full well that he could easily slip out of the handcuffs at will. But time was growing short and his Dead Warrant might come any day—which called for a bold plan. Since he was unable to use his hands, it was customary for Austin, his chief jailer, to feed him his dinner every afternoon. But when Austin came to see him on the morning of October 16, Sheppard was gone and all that remained was a pile of bricks and mortar on the floor. It sounds impossible for a man who is stapled to the floor, handcuffed, chained at the legs, loaded with irons, without tools, and locked in the strongest cell of the strongest jail in London to escape, but, Jack, like so many other geniuses, didn't know this was impossible and proceeded to escape.

He had waited until Austin had left him for the night on the 15th. He then slipped off his handcuffs and using all of his strength managed to snap a link in the chain binding his legs. He pulled the two parts of the chain up to his calves so that they made no noise as he moved about. He had noticed that a chimney ran through one

(Concluded on page 193)

"MA" BINGHAM

by
**FRANK
MARKS**

What could this Nazi want in the hills? "Ma" Bingham thought she knew—and how not to get there!

MA BINGHAM lifted herself heavily from the wicker arm-chair and crossed over to the ringing wall phone. Above the roar of the cloudburst that pounded like an angry cataract on the roof, she raised her voice:

"Binghams' Auto Court."

From another chair by the office window, Pa Bingham peered toward his wife. "Who is it, Ma?"

She gestured him silent and spoke again into the telephone. "The storm's so bad I can hardly make out what you're saying, Sheriff. Will you talk a little louder?"

Pa's faded eyes turned to the window and to the midnight expanse of countryside beyond, fast becoming a morass. The road past the auto court had been barricaded a few hours ago by the highway crew, for at the bottom of the grade a savage torrent sluiced in foaming fury around the concrete supports of Mill River Bridge, threatening the structure.

This, Pa thought, was probably what the sheriff's office was phoning about. Most likely they wanted to make sure no traffic got past the barricade, maybe to plunge into the flood and drown somebody. Out of control, the river was; but not as bad as it could be if it weren't for the big new dam farther up the canyon. The dam mightn't stop

all the flood, but it certainly kept the rising waters from turning into a disaster.

Pa turned again toward his wife, swiftly this time, when he heard her gasp: "A German spy—?"

Outside, the rain-lashed trees hissed like tortured giants as the old lady held the receiver tightly against her ear. Then her short words punctured the wail of the storm: "Land sakes! You don't tell me!"

The wrinkles in Pa's face deepened. German spies! Only day before yesterday he'd read about the nine Nazis who had landed on the coast from a U-boat. Eight of them had already been picked up, along with explosives, maps and plans for wrecking factories, power plants and railroad centers. By their own confession, though, a ninth saboteur was still running loose. Again Pa thought of the dam that harnessed the water to make electricity for the munition-making plants down in the cities.

The old man suddenly felt a twinge of uneasiness about his son, Ted, now an FBI agent. During these war times his work was more dangerous than ever. But Pa was mighty proud to know that his own boy—his and Ma's—with his unruly light hair and blue eyes, had grown up to be a Federal officer.

MEETS A NAZI



"I wanta use your phone,"
the man said in ugly tones

PA'S mind came back to the present when his wife again spoke into the phone: "Sounds—sounds just like the description of a man who came in here tonight. He was having car trouble; wet ignition or something. Pa's been working on it." She drew a short breath. "Yes, yes, Sheriff—but hurry! I—I think I'm a little scared."

She hung up the receiver and spoke nervously to her husband: "That was Sheriff Dodson. He says the one Nazi from the U-boat—the one they didn't catch—headed toward here. Hermann Reinhardt, is his name. I just know it's that man in Cabin 13."

"Now, Ma, don't be jumpin' at shadows."

"But I'm sure about it. He's got a scar near his left eye just like the sheriff says."

"Say, I did notice that. What's Dodson want us to do?"

"To hold him somehow until he gets here from Cardiff."

"Huh, that'll take him about three hours." The butt of an old army pistol showed above Pa's hip pocket when he reached back under his coat. "I'm going out and scout around."

"No, Pa. Don't you dare! He—he might kill you!"

"I'll just peek in the cabin window."

Pa started from the office, but before he reached the door it swung open and a heavy-set man was at the threshold. The intruder's drenched hat didn't hide the livid scar above his eye. His glance swept the interior, then settled on the elderly couple. "The entire telephone conversation I heard. I am leaving." There was a German accent to his arrogant tone.

Pa thought of the sheriff's instructions. "But your distributor's still wet." He motioned to the part drying by the pot-bellied stove.

"I will manage without it."

"How can you?"

The alien didn't answer the question. He went to the case on the counter and helped himself to cigarettes. As smoke sifted from his nostrils he crossed to the wall where a glass-covered forestry map hung.

Ma stood motionless, close to her husband. Her flesh seemed to be shaking like the aspens when the cold wind blows across the meadow. She glanced toward Pa's back pocket, and felt her blood chill. If he tried to use his pistol the Nazi would kill him in a second. Maybe they shouldn't try to hold him for the sheriff. She spoke in an undertone: "Can't you hurry and fix his car?"

Pa didn't answer, but admonished her with his eyes; to make her understand that he was aiming to hinder the Nazi from leaving.

REINHARDT was tracing over the wall map with a pencil, his back toward the old folks. For a moment Pa's eyes rested steadily on the saboteur; then his weathered features tightened as his hand moved slowly toward his rear pocket. This was his chance. He'd hold the Nazi at gun point; threaten to shoot if he moved; maybe Ma could tie him up.

As Ma saw her husband draw the weapon, his finger on the trigger as he started to raise it, her parted lips twitched in fear. Her staring eyes followed the rise of the pistol in Pa's hand.

But old Bingham hadn't realized that the glass cover of the map afforded sufficient reflection for Reinhardt to see the action behind him, and before the camp proprietor could level his gun the fugitive whirled, a Luger automatic in his grasp. A shot cracked above the storm.

Pa groaned when the bullet tore through his fingers. His pistol clat-

tered to the floor. Blood trickled down over his wrist when he held it up with his other hand. He sagged as if going to his knees, then regained himself and tried to reach his fallen weapon.

The German plunged forward, picked up the pistol and pushed it into his pocket. His thick fingers dug into the old man's neck as he raised the butt of his automatic.

Ma screamed:

"D-don't!"

With a sickening thud the alien's gun came down on Pa's head. Bingham's eyes closed and he crumpled limply. The old lady stared as if she thought such a thing couldn't happen; then, sobbing, she hurried to her husband and wrapped her apron around his wounded hand. Reinhardt pulled her backward. She looked up helplessly. "Pl—please don't kill him."

The Nazi picked up Bingham, carried him to the adjoining room and dropped him on the bed. He bound his wrists and ankles. Then he poked his Luger in Ma's back and said: "You and I will now be leaving."

"You—you mean you're going to make me go with you?"

"Precisely."

"No, no, please don't take me from my husband."

"From that little bump he will soon recover!"

"But—but your car—the distributor—"

"I am using yours."

"Our old Buick?"

Reinhardt nodded. "And you are going to drive it. I shall need you to answer questions in case we are stopped."

"I—I can't do that. Please, you go. I'll tell the sheriff anything you want me to if you won't make me leave Pa."

"This arguing!" Reinhardt exploded. "Cease it!"

HE PULLED out the phone wires and smashed the transmitter. Forcing her to the door, out into the stormy night and on to the garage, he ordered her into the driver's seat of her battered sedan. From his own disabled car he took two heavy cases and put them in the Buick. Then taking his place in the rear, he thrust his gun between the backs of the front seat. "Now go!"

Ma started the car, bounced through the puddles to the highway and turned north away from the river. Her captor reached over and gave the wheel a yank. "Do you think I am fool enough to go toward Cardiff, and the police?"

"But we can't go the other way; the bridge—!"

"Turn toward the river!"

Ma swung the car around, veered past the road barricade and started down the grade. The wagging windshield wiper struggled with the sheets of water that slapped against the glass. Near the bottom of the hill the headlights barely picked out the bridge outlines; the abutments cutting the milky water like the prows of ships.

Ma Bingham's shaking foot pressed down the brake pedal. "You—you can't even see the road over the bridge."

"Never mind the bridge. A side road skirting the river shows on your office map. Are you familiar with it?"

"Y—yes, but that road goes up to the dam."

"Exactly."

"And—you want me—!"

"Slow down; this must be the road right ahead."

Ma brought the car to a standstill, and looked far off into the darkness toward the mountains; the watershed that filled the big lake behind the new dam. Now she knew why the Nazi was going up there with the two heavy cases. He was going to blow up the

great dam so there would be no more electric power for the factories making war materials. Such were the plans of the saboteurs from the U-boat.

"Drive up this road!"

Ma felt lifeless, unable to move as the savage storm droned on the car top. Up the canyon the blackness resembled an enveloping shroud that threatened to suffocate all who entered. Like a trapped animal, she reluctantly turned onto the dirt road.

IT SEEMED that her heart beats were trying to keep up with the motor as the car labored up the muddy grade. If only she knew of some way to save the dam and hand this spy over to the police. She wished she didn't feel so scared, then maybe she could think of something to do that would aid her country; she'd be remembered then, the same as her ancestors who had fought and died in the Revolution.

Her mind turned to her son. She wondered where he was, and if he'd had anything to do with catching the other eight Nazis from the U-boat. She never knew where Ted was, or what he was doing. His work was all so secret.

Reinhardt broke in: "How much farther to the dam?"

"I—I think about five miles."

She tried to imagine what would happen after she got to the dam with the German. He could set his explosives and then go on foot over the mountain to some place where they wouldn't find him. Her own fate wasn't so sure, though; or maybe it was. She'd seen pictures of what the Nazis had done. They were ruthless. This might be her last ride.

Her arms ached from holding the old sedan to the winding road. It was hard to see ahead very far, too. The streaks of rain in the headlight's rays were like whip lashes hissing angrily.

The weighted foliage slapped against the windshield as if it were a warning hand of disaster.

And then a sudden idea made Ma Bingham straighten. About two miles before she would get to the dam there was a back road which connected with the one she was on. This detour curved back through the woods to the main highway north of the auto court, and on the way to Cardiff where the sheriff had phoned from. If she could turn on to this cross road without her unwelcome passenger getting suspicious, she might reach the main highway ahead of the sheriff, before he passed the point where she would come out of the woods. Then she could deliver the fugitive to the officers.

It was an awful chance for her to take, for the Nazi most likely would shoot her if he found she had tricked him. Ma's mouth set in a hard line of determination as she went on toward the cross road, not far ahead now. She must take the risk and not go on up the canyon.

As her headlights pointed upward from a road dip, the light shafts fell on a rock formation—a landmark she knew well — "Indian Head." It was where the detour joined the road to the dam. She glanced back at her passenger. He seemed unconcerned, probably feeling safe enough in the isolated area . . .

MA SWUNG suddenly into the cross road.

Reinhardt leaned forward. "Are you sure that this is the right way?"

"Of—of course; I was brought up in this country."

The saboteur scanned the woods and then settled back with a grunt. Ma felt relieved, for the time at least. She was putting more territory between the dam and the man who meant to wreck

it. But she was still worried, for the distance to the main highway was more than to the dam and there was yet a chance that he might suspect something. She tried to make more speed.

She figured up the time spent since they had left the auto court; how much more it would take before she would come to the state highway. She thought of the distance to Cardiff, and about where the sheriff should be when she got out of the woodland. If only she would reach the main road before the posse passed to the south.

Reinhardt stirred uneasily. "Should not the dam be in sight?"

"I—I'm going as fast as I can."

She gave thanks for the country being dense with undergrowth, and for the winding road. You couldn't see anything of the highway until you got right on it. The last half mile seemed to have no end, and she was shaking worse than ever now, for any minute a bullet might end everything.

The sedan went under a canopy of foliage that seemed to part suddenly to show the state road. Ma drove the Buick onto the concrete and started toward Cardiff.

"This is not the road to the dam!"

She said nothing and kept on going. Reinhardt clamped his hands on her shoulders. "Stop!"

The car shuddered to a standstill, but still Ma made no reply. She felt the menacing Luger at her back.

"This is your last second . . . !"

SHE closed her eyes and waited for the bullet. In that moment it seemed that she lived her whole life over; every event from her childhood raced by like a moving picture where scenes change quickly to show passing years.

Ma lifted her lashes when the hum of distant tires reached her ears. She

looked up the road. An approaching car was rounding the curve, its headlights turning to shine directly on the old Buick. The Nazi exploded something in German, then ordered: "Back into the woods!" The machine was coming at high speed and the fugitive seemed to realize that it was too late. "Drive toward that car!" he changed his command.

He crouched on the floor, his automatic punching into her. "If questions they ask about me say that your husband has me bound at the auto court."

"Yes—yes, I will."

"Another thing; they may want to know where you are going. What will you say?"

"I—I'll tell them I just got word from the hospital; that my son was hurt at the factory."

"That will do, and no more tricks; understand?"

"I understand."

The car was close now, its brakes grinding. It came to a stop directly in the path of the Buick. It was the big black and white state patrol; the automobile Ma had hoped to intercept. Two men got out and came toward her. One was elderly, dark-haired. The other was younger, wore no hat, and the wind ruffled his light hair. Ma said, "Howdy, Sheriff Dodson," and looked steadily into the blue eyes of the young man.

He stared oddly for a moment. "Hello, Mrs. Bingham." It was a few seconds before he asked, "What became of the Nazi spy at your auto court?"

"He—he's tied up; Pa got the best of him."

"Good work; but where are you going?"

"I—I got a call from the hospital. Ted was hurt at the factory; that's my

son," she added by way of explanation.

"Oh, I see. I'm sorry to hear it."

MA PRESSED the starter and the sedan started to creep forward, past the two men from the patrol car. Then with unexpected suddenness the rear door of her Buick was jerked open. There was a snarl in German, the Luger barked and a bullet tore through the roof behind her.

Bringing her car to a quick stop, Ma jumped to the highway. She saw the young man trying to crush the Nazi to the floor. The spy was striving to twist his gun hand free from his attacker's clamping fingers. With desperate strength the German was slowly raising his Luger, bringing the officer's arm up with it. Ma gasped when she saw the pistol almost on a level with the hatless man's head.

At that critical instant the door on the other side of the Bingham sedan was pulled open by the older man. He struck the Nazi's arm. The bullet from the Luger ploughed into the floor. The newcomer lifted his revolver and brought the stock down on the fugitive's head, a glancing blow. He raised it again. The alien dropped his weapon and put up his hands. "I surrender!"

It was only a matter of seconds be-

fore steel clicked around the saboteur's wrists. He was hauled to the roadway. The tight lines of his face showed the hatred he nursed for the Americans who had brought about his downfall. He brought his heels together in military style and extended his arm perfunctorily. "Heil Hitler!" he shouted. After a moment's attention he lowered his hand and said, "I am curious to know how you suspected that I was in the car."

The elder man answered, "Ma gave us the tip."

"How?"

"When she spoke to this young man she called him, Sheriff Dodson. I'm Sheriff Dodson, and Ma has known me for years. Then when she said that Ted was in the hospital we guessed what was up. For this man is Ted—Ted Bingham of the F.B.I.—and Ma's own son."

IT WAS later at the auto court when Pa Bingham had been cared for that Ted put his arm around his mother's shoulders. "Ma, you should have a medal for bravery."

She shook her head. "I wasn't brave, Ted. Why, I was just plain scared."

"That's what makes a hero, Ma; being just plain scared."

THE END

TIME BOMB TESTERS

WHEN "Butch" of gang number one wants to wipe out "Spike" of gang number two by sending him a time bomb wrapped in a pretty little package, which explodes when opened, he should make sure that "Spike" is not "wise" to the latest methods of examining packages suspected of containing a bomb or other machine which may be actuated by clock mechanisms.

The safest method of determining whether a package contains a clockwork bomb is the use of portable x-ray equipment, fluoroscopic the suspected package before it is moved or disturbed. It has also been considered advisable to use a

physician's stethoscope to aid in hearing the "tick" or "click" of the movement of the clock escape mechanism. However, the latest improved method is listening for such sounds by use of an amplifier and a contact microphone.

"Spike" may also know it is now common procedure to submerge a suspected package in heavy oil to stop any clock mechanism on a time bomb. The old method of subversion in water did not always keep the bomb from going off because it is possible to include a secondary means of ignition in the package so that even if submerged in water, the bomb will function as intended.

—Carter T. Wainwright.

THE MAN NO JAIL COULD HOLD

(Concluded from page 185)

wall of his cell and this was his only means of escape.

With only a broken link in each band, Jack started to pick at the walls. All this time, a jailer stood outside his door, but the walls were so thick that no noise was heard. As he was removing the bricks, one at a time, he came upon an iron bar about two and half feet long and one inch thick in the chimney. With this his task was easy and he was soon inside the chimney. He then started to break through the chimney again, this time at the room above his cell. However, he was not acquainted with Newgate and found himself in another cell, almost as strong as his own, known as the Red Room, which had been unused for over seven years. But Jack was full of confidence now. He quickly removed the plate covering the lock on the door with his iron bar and it was only a matter of minutes until the lock was picked and the door swung open. Blocking his way to freedom was a door leading to the chapel, but it was bolted on the opposite side. Using his iron bar again, he broke a hole in the wall and put his hand through to unholt the door. He entered the deserted chapel and climbed over the iron spikes which divided the prisoners section from the rest of the chapel. As he passed over the spikes, he broke one off to use as a weapon if discovered. He left the chapel and entered a long passageway leading to the wall surrounding the prison. The first door he came upon he picked as he did the one in the Red Room, but the next door required a half-hour before he could open it with his iron bar and a nail.

The lock of the next door resisted all his efforts to either pick it or break it and so he had to dig it away from the doorpost and squeeze through. The last door was bolted on his side and after he had opened it he found himself on the wall. The drop from the top of the wall to either the street or to the roof of a nearby house was too much for even Jack to attempt, but this did not stop him. He calmly retraced his steps until he was once again in his cell, the Castle. He took his blanket and returned to the wall. He attached the blanket to the outside of the wall with the spike he had picked up in the Chapel and eased himself down to the roof of a nearby house.

The door leading from the roof fortunately was open and he started to go down the stairs. As he passed a room, his chains made a noise which was heard inside the room. The people inside thought it was their dog moving about and did

not bother to investigate. Not wanting to take any unnecessary chances, Jack returned to the roof to wait until the people went to sleep. About eleven o'clock, no sound came from the room and Jack slipped into the street.

Still carrying his chains, Jack walked through the dark and deserted streets, through the town and out into the fields where he dropped thoroughly exhausted and slept.

WHILE in prison, he had sold his "dying" confession to a publisher for a large sum of money—thus having that large sum of money with him. But he could not go about in the daytime until he was rid of his chains. He met a poor shoemaker and offered £1 (about \$5.00) if he would bring him some blacksmith's tools to remove the chains. The man's suspicions were satisfied when Jack told him that he had just escaped from the Bridewell where he had been kept for failing to provide for his illegitimate child. The man sympathized with Jack and returned with the tools.

With his usual disregard for safety, Jack went to Charing Cross and had a hearty meal. For over a week he wandered about through his old haunts. He even found time to break into a pawnbroker's shop. He pretended that a whole gang was in the shop by shouting orders to himself as he ransacked the place. The owners and their assistants, thinking a small army must be in the shop, lay shivering in their beds.

Jack visited his mother who begged him to leave England, but he refused. All day long he drank and by night he was thoroughly drunk and noisy. On one of these nights a boy reported his whereabouts to the jailers, who easily captured him in his helpless condition.

This time the Dead Warrant came through before Jack could escape, but he did not stop thinking of a means to cheat the hangman. He had managed to get hold of a sharp pocket knife and formed a plan. He knew that he was to be taken in a cart from the prison to Tyburn for the hanging. He planned to lean forward in the cart as if bowed with sorrow and remorse. With the knife he was going to cut the ropes that bound his wrists to the cart and when the cart reached the Holborn Turnstile, he would jump out. Here the streets were so narrow that the officers could not chase him on horseback and he knew the people would not try to stop him.

This bold plan would have worked just as all of Jack's escapes if an officer hadn't cut himself on the knife as he felt Jack's pocket's. With the knife gone, Jack was helpless and was taken to Tyburn to be hanged.

Jack Sheppard was only twenty-three at the time of his death, but already his feats were a legend among the people who were thoroughly grieved when he died.

PATROLMAN STARK



There wasn't much patrolman Stark could do all trussed up in the back of this truck—but at least he could make his "funeral" smell sweet!

RAISES A STINK

By

ROBERT C. BLACKMON



Bottles burst like bombs all over the big warehouse

THE light was a mere flicker in the darkness shrouding the warehouse-lined street. It showed faintly for but a moment, coming from the black maw of the alley ahead and across the brick-paved street.

Patrolman Lee Stark saw it, and muscles tightened in his chunky, blue-clad body. Moving fast in the thick darkness, he went along the cracked sidewalk and stopped beside the dark bulk

of a telephone pole opposite the alley mouth.

The bright metal shield pinned to the left side of his blue uniform jacket glinted softly in the darkness. His right hand touched the butt of the Police Positive at his right hip. His wide-set gray eyes were glistening beneath the visor of his uniform cap, and his lips were pulled into a hard, straight line.

The light could have been the glow

of a watchman's flashlight. A few of the warehouses in the district had watchmen, but most of them did not. The Mandel warehouse, served by the alley, did have a watchman.

But the light could also mean that another warehouse in the district was being robbed. There had been three warehouse robberies in as many weeks and the newspapers were yelling for blood—cop blood. If another robbery occurred, the newspapers would get that blood—and some of it would be his! Someone would replace him, as he had replaced the former cop on this beat just four days ago!

Quickly, he left the pole and crossed the street. Reaching the opposite curb, he crossed the uneven sidewalk and stepped into the smothering darkness of the alley. The Police Positive was in his right fist, his service flashlight in his left. He did not turn the light on. Its bright eye would make a perfect target.

The narrow passage was unpaved, but heavily laden trucks had rolled and pounded the earth into something resembling pavement. Avoiding the high, rough center, he followed the left wheel track, moving slowly because of the darkness. To his right, he sensed rather than saw the blank brick wall flanking the alley on that side. The left sleeve of his jacket brushed the wall on his left. Ahead, he could see the lighter, gray darkness in the form of a rough rectangle. He moved toward it, eyes and ears straining.

The flicker of light did not show again. He saw nothing but the gray rectangle ahead, heard nothing but the almost inaudible sound of his feet on packed earth, the thrum of pulse in his ears.

He reached the gray rectangle and saw that it was formed by a deep setback or court in the left wall of the

alley. Open to the sky, the court allowed more light to enter the alley at that point. The space formed a deep loading space, for trucks could pull up into the alley, then back around into the space and to the warehouse loading platform across its far end. The loading platform was that of the Mandel warehouse. Even now, a huge truck-trailer unit was backed up to the loading platform.

Stark stood motionless, staring.

The time was after midnight. Legitimate truckers would hardly be here at this time of night, working in total darkness. No light came from the truck or from the loading platform behind it. But the truck could be parked here, waiting for the warehouse to open in the morning before—

A FLICKER of light showed behind the truck, on the loading platform, and Stark's lips flattened against his teeth. His chunky hands tightened on gun and flashlight. He heard a muffled, rolling sound, then a man's hoarse voice reached him through the darkness.

"A few more loads, Mandel, and we'll be ready to roll! I'll have the boys—"

The hoarse voice faded. The flicker of light died on the loading platform. Something rolled across the platform and into the warehouse, coming from the truck.

Stark stood rigidly, his mind racing. Mandel would be Kirby Mandel. Mandel handled cosmetics, toilet waters, perfumes and similar goods, all very expensive. But Mandel would hardly be here at midnight, supervising the loading of a truck in darkness. The answer was obvious—Kirby Mandel's warehouse was being robbed, with Kirby Mandel's knowledge and help!

Stark's right fist tightened about the butt of his service gun. His gray eyes

took on a hard, cold sheen. He moved into the deep loading court, intending to get closer to the truck and platform before making his presence known.

He made one step, then a foot scuffed on the packed earth behind him. He tried to spin around, swing his gun and flashlight. But even as he moved, a gun barrel whipped through the darkness in a vicious arc. He heard a man grunt with physical effort, and the swinging gun barrel caught him on the left side of the head, just above the ear. It drove his head over on his right shoulder and exploded hot, numbing pain in his skull.

The shock of the blow seemed to flash into every part of his chunky body, draining strength from his muscles. He felt his right fist open, felt the Police Positive slip from his fingers. The flashlight dropped from his left hand. His legs folded beneath him and he crashed to the packed earth. He wasn't entirely unconscious, but everything was confused and hazy. He heard a man's voice, coming from a distance:

"What's the matter, Muggs?"

Another voice, above him, answered hoarsely:

"The cop on this beat, Roy. He sneaked into the alley a coupla minutes ago. I got him just right and slugged him. Now what?"

Stark tried to move, and couldn't. Consciousness seemed to ebb and flow into his throbbing head like waves on a beach. Muggs, he knew dazedly, was the lookout stationed in the alley. Somehow he'd missed Muggs in the darkness.

"Get him up here, Muggs." Roy, on the platform, spoke savagely. "This *would* happen. Move fast, Chick. You and Mandel'll have to move the stuff faster. We've got to get out of here, fast. Come on, Muggs. Get the cop-

per up here and help move the stuff. Move!"

Rough hands pulled at Stark's uniformed body and he tried to fight. He couldn't. His muscles would not obey his will to move. He was lifted, and the movement doubled the pain in his head. Everything went black.

THE next thing he knew, he was lying on the rough planking of the loading platform near the open doors of the big truck-trailer. A man's tall, dark figure loomed over him. The man held a gun in his right fist.

Three other men were wheeling rubber-tired hand trucks from the warehouse, across the platform and into the big trailer. The hand trucks were loaded with piled cartons and boxes on the trip into the trailer, and were empty when they returned to the warehouse. Each of the men held a small flashlight to light his way.

Stark kept his eyes slitted and watched the man over him, the others. He scarcely breathed.

The hand trucks made trip after trip, then stopped. Muggs came out of the warehouse and stopped near the tall man.

"Okay, Roy," he said hoarsely. "Mandel says that's all the high-priced stuff, and the trailer's about full. What about the cop? Do we bust him and leave him here—with the other?"

"No, you fool!" Roy cursed. "We haul him to the drop shed, along with the watchman. We drop the load there, then ditch the watchman and the cop in the next county. They won't be found for a few days. In the meantime, we have a chance to get clear."

"But—but there was to be no k-killing, Anders." Kirby Mandel came out on the platform. In the glow of Anders' flashlight, he was a short, fat ball of a man in a gray suit and hat. His

small, dark eyes were bright with fear, his round face pasty. "I can't become involved in anything connected with m-murder, Anders. I—I'll have to get out and—"

"That won't go, Mandel." Roy Anders' voice was harsh. "You're in to stay. You'll burn just like Muggs, Chick or me if we're caught. We'll see that you do. Muggs, tie that copper up and toss him in the trailer. Mandel, *you're* going to bump the cop at the drop shed! With a killing around your neck, you *can't* step out, see?"

"No! No!" The fat warehouse owner's voice was shrill with horror. "I—I can't! I—"

"It's that, or maybe we ditch *three* stiffs in the next county!" Roy Anders snapped. The gun in his right hand winked blue in the flashlight glow.

Kirby Mandel's short, fat body stiffened. He moaned.

"I—I—I'll do it!" he whimpered. "I'll—"

"I thought you'd see it our way, Mandel, old boy." Roy Anders laughed shortly. "Okay. Let's get going."

MUGGS took short lengths of rope from the trailer and moved along the loading platform toward Stark. Knowing he could not hope to fight the three men unarmed and in a semi-unconscious condition Stark let himself go entirely limp. He did not resist at all as Muggs bound his wrists and ankles.

He was carried to the trailer and dumped on the floor. The doors slammed shut and were fastened. He heard the truck motor start and the big unit moved away from the loading platform of the Mandel warehouse. It twisted into the alley, lurched out into the brick paved street. Within a few

minutes, its ten tires were rolling on smooth pavement, speeding toward the drop shed which Anders had mentioned. When it stopped, Stark knew, Death would be waiting for him, unless—

Wincing as the movement made his head hurt, he squirmed himself into a sitting position, bracing his bound hands behind him on the trailer floor. The floor, he discovered, was of wood, protected by spaced iron straps screwed down to the planking. He groped around in the darkness, hoping to find a broken iron strap, a protruding screw, anything to help him free his wrists.

His fingers touched the base of a stack of cartons. The trailer, he knew, was well loaded, leaving a narrow space between the stacked load and the closed rear doors. The stacked cartons and boxes would contain expensive perfumes, toilet waters and other cosmetics. Mandel was going to "lose" several thousand dollars in the "robbery" tonight. The goods were probably covered by insurance. Mandel, Roy Anders and Chick would collect twice—the insurance and whatever they received for the "stolen" goods.

Squirming, swearing, Stark kept feeling around in the darkness. His fingers found a man's still body, and he started sweating. The man's head had been crushed in by a terrific blow. He was dead. He was the Mandel warehouse watchman. Mandel had double-crossed his own employee and it was murder now.

Grimly, Stark felt around on the trailer floor. His fingers touched an irregularly round sheet-metal patch on the planking. Used apparently to cover a small hole through the floor, the patch had been struck by hand truck wheels until it was dished in. Its outer edges were lifted up a little from the floor planking, baring rough, sharp metal.

Some of the nails holding the patch were half-drawn from the wood and loose. Grinning tightly into the total darkness of the trailer interior, Stark jammed the rope about his wrists against the sharp metal of the patch edge, rubbed the hemp strands against it. The strain of holding himself in the awkward position made him tremble, but he kept working. He grunted as a strand of the rope parted, worked harder.

MOMENTS later, his hands were free. He freed the ropes from his ankles.

The trailer was moving swiftly along the highway now. Stark could hear the *whoosh* of passing cars, an occasional horn blast.

Scrambling to his feet, he groped around in the darkness with his outstretched hands. To his left were the stacked cartons and boxes of the trailer's load. They filled the forward end of the trailer. To his right were the closed rear doors of the trailer.

Swaying with the movement of the big unit, he felt over the inside surface of the closed door, hoping to find some way to release the outer latch. But the inside of the doors was entirely smooth.

A faint, screaming wail sounded outside, swept closer. It came alongside the trailer, and he knew it was the siren of a highway patrol car.

Yelling as loudly as he could, he pounded on the trailer doors with his fists, hoping to make enough noise to attract the attention of the patrolmen in the car. But the siren wail sped past and was gone.

Swearing with disappointment, he groped his way back to the metal patch on the trailer floor and worked at it with chunky fingers. The nails holding the patch to the wood were fairly loose and rusty.

Moments later, he succeeded in prying the patch from the trailer floor, and discovered a hole about three inches in diameter through the floor planking. Through the hole came the dull rumble of the truck motor, ten tires rolling on pavement, exhaust tainted air, and dust. A car passed the speeding trailer, and Stark saw the glow of its lights on the pavement streaking past below him.

Scowling, he stared through the hole.

If he had his gun, he could fire through the hole and attract attention. But he did not have his gun. He had nothing but his two fists, the metal patch and a few rusty nails, the stacked cartons in the trailer.

He stiffened and grunted softly as a strange, wild plan flashed into his mind. His gray eyes seemed to glow in the darkness.

The highway was patrolled. The siren indicated that. He could use that fact, the hole in the trailer floor, and the stacked cartons from Mandel's warehouse!

Grinning into the darkness, he groped for the stacked cartons. His chunky fingers tore a carton open, felt the tops of bottles. . . .

THE trailer moved slower. Stark felt it turn to the right and bump off the edge of the pavement. It rolled slowly over rough earth, then stopped, moved backward in a cramped turn. The truck motor echoed hollowly in an enclosed space. Then the motor was switched off.

They had reached the drop shed.

Stark heard the truck doors open and close. He heard Muggs, Roy Anders, Chick and Kirby Mandel talking as they moved along the side of the trailer toward the rear doors.

Grimly, he waited for the rear door latch to open. Hinges squealed as the doors were thrown back—but no light

came into the trailer through the open doors. A stacked carton wall had plugged the end of the trailer, closing the door opening. Stark had shifted the cartons and built the wall before the truck stopped.

Grinning, he stood behind the wall, four opened cartons well within his reach. He held two ornate bottles taken from one of the cartons in his fists. Several empty cartons were stacked off to one side, near the body of the dead warehouse watchman.

He heard Roy Anders say:

"Hey! The load's shifted! It's slid back and plugged the—"

Roy Anders cursed savagely.

"No, it ain't the load shifted! It's the copper! He got loose, piled the stuff back here to keep us out! Come on, Muggs, Mandel, Chick! Tear that stack down and get that copper! Move fast!"

Stark hefted the two bottles in his hands as the cartons started shifting in the wall across the rear of the trailer. He heard Roy Anders still cursing.

A carton was pulled out of the wall, leaving a square opening through which yellow light streamed. Stark saw the interior of a building through the opening, and knew he was in the drop shed. Hundreds of boxes, crates and cartons were stacked across the far end of the shed, and he knew they were loot from other warehouse robberies. He knew that Roy Anders, Chick and Muggs had robbed other warehouses!

Another carton was pulled from the wall across the rear end of the trailer and he saw Muggs' broad face. Quickly, he flung the bottle in his right hand, shifted the second bottle from his left and threw it too.

The first bottle flew through the opening, moving fast. It hit Muggs squarely in the face and knocked him away from the opening. The second

bottle arched through the opening, hit the shed floor and burst. The smell of lilacs became very strong. The bottle had contained lilac toilet water.

Stark bent, pulled more bottles from the opened cartons about him, tossed them through the opening in the stacked carton wall across the end of the trailer. He heard the bottles smash on the shed floor. The smell of lilacs became almost overpoweringly strong in the air. Stark threw more bottles, and his nose wrinkled as the smell became sickeningly strong.

"Get that copper out of the trailer!"

Roy Anders was raging outside. "Get him!"

Chick's face appeared in the opening in the carton wall, and Stark flung more bottles, taking them from the opened cartons nearby. A bottle hit Chick in the face, burst, and he disappeared, howling. The smell of trailing arbutus mingled with the lilac reek in the air.

Stark grinned broadly. His nose was wrinkled.

ROY ANDERS' right fist appeared in the opening. It held an automatic. The gun roared twice, the double explosion almost bursting Stark's eardrums. But Anders was shooting wildly and both slugs missed, tearing past Stark to smash into the stacked cartons at the front of the trailer. The interior of the trailer started smelling strongly of roses and cordite. The combination was nauseating.

Stark flung a bottle at Roy Anders' hand, and hit the gun. The bottle smashed on the metal and the smell of violets mingled with the other smells. Roy Anders' right hand disappeared, still holding the gun, but streaming blood and toilet water. Roy Anders was screaming with pain and fury.

Stark kept throwing bottles out through the hole in the stacked carton

wall across the rear of the trailer. Every one of the bottles were bursting on the shed floor. The mingled smell of flowers blocked out the reek of cordite, blocked out everything else. The smell grew in intensity until it seemed to have weight and thickness. Stark was scowling, and trying to breathe as little as he could.

Kirby Mandel was screaming:

"Stop him, somebody! He's breaking hundreds of dollars in perfumes and toilet waters! Stop him, Anders, Chick, Mugs! Stop him!"

Mandel's round face appeared in the wall opening, and Stark took several quick steps.

He banged a bottle of toilet water across Mandel's round skull, as the fat warehouse owner tried to crawl through the opening. Mandel howled, twisted frantically, and a dozen cartons tumbled from the stacked wall. Mandel fell with them, crashing to the shed floor at the rear of the trailer. Mandel, half buried beneath the filled cartons on the shed floor, started screaming for help at the top of his voice.

Through the larger opening in the wall, Stark could see Mugs, huddled in a sitting position on the shed floor some distance from the trailer. Mugs had both hands up to his face and blood was dripping through his fingers. Chick, nearby, was moaning and trying to stop the bleeding from a cheek laid open by a bursting toilet water bottle. The air was heavy with the mingled perfume of many flowers.

Roy Anders was about eight feet from the rear of the trailer, standing. He was shaking his glass-slashed, perfume soaked right hand. His smeared gun was in his left hand. He was swearing savagely.

Stark threw two bottles of toilet water at Chick, and the man howled again. He turned and ran toward the

other end of the shed, dropping his gun on the floor as he ran.

Roy Anders yelled. He brought the gun in his left hand up, aiming at Stark in the trailer.

Stark threw two bottles of toilet water as hard as he could, and grinned as the first hit Anders in the stomach. Roy Anders fired at the same time, but the slug hit the rafters of the shed building, bringing down splinters and dirt. The second bottle hit Anders in the face, knocked him flat on the floor. He did not drop his gun.

Lee Stark scrambled from the trailer, a bottle in each hand, and ran toward Anders.

THE tall man fired again, wildly, and the slug gashed paint on the side of the trailer behind Stark. Then Stark was within reach of Anders. He knocked the gun from Anders' left hand with a swinging bottle, grunted as the glass container burst and showered both him and Anders with violet toilet water. Anders spat blood, tried to scramble to his feet, and Stark hit him over the head with the other bottle. The bottle did not break.

Anders went limp and Stark faced Chick, at the other end of the shed. Chick put both hands over his head and started chattering wildly. Blood was streaming from his face.

"I didn't have nothing to do with it! Roy killed the watchman! Mandel didn't want him to do it, but he did! Mugs slugged you! I didn't know there was to be killing! We didn't kill anybody robbing the other warehouses! I—"

Lee Stark recovered Roy Anders' gun. It dripped toilet water as he held it.

He heard brakes squeal outside the shed. Two uniformed highway patrolmen came into the shed, guns in hand,

eyes wary. Both were scowling. Kirby Mandel, still half covered by the cartons which had fallen from the wall, was moaning.

"This is the bunch that robbed all of the warehouses in town," Lee Stark explained to the patrolmen. "The stuff from the other robberies is stacked in the shed. The stuff from the Mandel job is in the trailer—what's left of it. Some of the robberies were inside jobs, like the Mandel warehouse tonight, but all of that can be ironed out later. This bunch—"

"Yeah. Yeah." One of the patrolmen growled. His broad nose was wrinkled. "But how come all the smell?"

"Oh, that." Patrolman Lee Stark grinned broadly. "I tore a metal patch off the trailer floor, opened a few cartons, and dropped bottles of perfume and toilet water through the hole. They

broke on the pavement. I knew the highway was patrolled. I thought the broken bottles and the perfumes would make a trail, and—"

"And how!" The patrolman's nose wrinkled more. "The highway for three miles back smelled like twenty beauty parlors—and then some! Roses, lilacs, violets — everything. Mack and me were patrolling the highway, ran into the smells, the busted bottles. We followed the trail they made to this joint. Then we heard the yelling and shooting in here. You sure made a trail to—"

"A trail to murder." Patrolman Lee Stark stopped grinning. His gray eyes were grim. "The Mandel warehouse watchman was murdered tonight. His body is in the trailer. Anders, Chick, Muggs and Mandel are going to pay plenty for that. They'll follow a trail to the electric chair!"

SABOTEURS VIA THE AIR WAVES

THE Federal Communications Commission, more familiarly called the F.C.C., has a very difficult job at the present time. Highly-skilled radio technicians in America have been communicating direct with their principals in the Axis countries by means of secret radio installations. These spies send compromising reports and receive their orders intended to sabotage our industrial output. These fifth columnists appropriate wave lengths used by licensed amateurs and use their assigned call letters when communicating with Europe.

The job of tracking down these spies was given to the experts of the F.C.C. They are responsible for keeping tabs on the commercial broadcasts and the 55,000 licensed amateur stations that operate in the United States. This staff includes some of the most clever and adept radio detectives in the world.

To stop these Nazi spies, the F.C.C. has greatly enlarged and improved upon its checkup system. All amateurs have been forbidden to communicate with foreign operators, no matter in what country they may be, and a strict ban has been placed on the use of portable transmitters. Official listen-

ing posts are being increased monthly, and at every moment of the day and night skilled operators are at their posts, listening to anything and everything that goes over the air.

Foreign language conversations are still permitted, but they are watched very closely and it is an easy matter to spot secret codes. These experts can recognize the individual touch of some operator and by a process of cross-checking, the agent can be apprehended. The agents are usually clever and cunning, and tracking them down is a match of wits, but the F.C.C. usually get their man or woman, for both sexes have been taking a hand at the game.

Thanks to the extreme capabilities of the monitor-search system which the F.C.C. uses, these spies are daily finding it more difficult to maintain contact with their principals. Inevitably their activities are cut short by the wavering needle of some radio "detective's" meter.

Operating from the heart of a big city or from some small well-hidden outpost, the radio spies haven't got a chance, for the most skillful agents in the world, our F.C.C. detectives, will see that America is kept intact.—Pete Wells.

THE GAY CAREER OF CAPTAIN LA FONTAINE

THIS daring captain led a very interesting and very eventful life to say the least.

Peter De la Fontaine was born into the French nobility and was educated in a military academy as was the fashion during that era. Peter started his career of love, adventure and crime soon after his first army campaign when he returned to "gay Páree". Here he met a country gentleman who became attracted to De la Fontaine and invited him to visit his home. During the visit, De la Fontaine fell in love with the daughter of his host. When the father forbid the marriage, the young couple eloped.

Upon returning to Paris, De la Fontaine took his young bride to a convent while he went about attending to his financial matters. During one of these trips, he was seized, after a desperate sword fight, by the king's guards on the charge of running away with an heiress, a capital offense in France. He soon had the daughter of the prison-keeper under the influence of his charms and she permitted him to leave on several occasions to visit his wife. At the trial his wife swore that the elopement had taken place with her approval and thus De la Fontaine was acquitted. A short time later his wife died while giving birth to a child.

After his wife's death, De la Fontaine returned to the army where he was promoted to a lieutenant of grenadiers for his extreme bravery in battle. In the meantime, another young lady had fallen madly in love with De la Fontaine while he was in Paris and had used her political influence to meet her beloved. After meeting De la Fontaine she dressed in men's clothes and volunteered to serve in his regiment. The commanding officer, being also a romantic man, accepted her enlistment. During the campaign, the young lady contracted small-pox and died leaving part of her fortune to her paramour.

After the campaign, De la Fontaine returned to Paris, but had to leave very hurriedly by ship after he had killed a fellow officer in a duel. His ship was captured by the Turks while en route to Martiniro and De la Fontaine soon found himself in a Turkish dungeon living on bread and water. Through a fellow prisoner, De la Fontaine became acquainted with a Scottish nobleman residing in Constantinople who was known for his great benevolence. The Scotchman was easily swayed by De la Fontaine to secure his release.

Our gay cavalier then traveled to Amsterdam where he fell in love with a young lady. After

a passionate love affair De la Fontaine traveled to Curacao for his "health". From here he went to Surinam where he led a very quiet life for about five years until he met a wealthy widow of rank at one of the halls given by the island governor.

Our hero decided to win this fair lady for his own and easily succeeded. They lived as husband and wife and had four children. The lady, however, had been pursued by other officers before her meeting with De la Fontaine and he discovered one officer who had made love to her during his absence. De la Fontaine challenged the officer to a duel, but the officer knowing full well of his opponent's ability as a swordsman politely refused. This irked De la Fontaine so that he struck the officer with his cane severing one of his ears.

For this deed De la Fontaine was tried by court martial, but was found not guilty. He returned to live with his lady love, but his enemies still plotted against him. Finally they succeeded in bribing a servant to poison De la Fontaine. Our hero, however, was not ready to die, even though during his illness his loved one did pass out of this world.

De la Fontaine then traveled to England where he set himself up in very lavish surroundings and soon squandered his money. Looking around for means of support, he married a widow with a considerable fortune which he soon spent.

He then became acquainted with a man named Zannier, a Venetian, who had been politely told to leave Venice if he wanted a whole skin. Zannier quietly framed De la Fontaine into another marriage and tried to blackmail him for bigamy. De la Fontaine refused to pay and found himself in jail. When visited by Zannier in jail, De la Fontaine became so wrought up that he beat Zannier with a cane into an almost senseless condition. To revenge himself Zannier framed De la Fontaine with a forgery case and, although some were inclined to believe that Zannier was guilty himself (which was true), the court sentenced De la Fontaine to death.

Using his influence, De la Fontaine managed to have his sentence commuted to life banishment from England. He went to the United States where he spent the rest of his life in comparative quiet after his very hectic years in Europe. Not a very severe sentence for all his crimes—but then there are some men who have never admitted that crimes performed while making love to a fair damsel are really crimes.—*John R. Holmes.*



Loyalty is synonymous with dogs.
That's why O'Sheen figured there
was something screwy when a dog
deserted his master in danger...

O'SHEEN GOES TO THE DOGS

By LEROY YERXA

"W HAM." Officer "Paddy" O'Sheen stopped dead in his tracks in the darkness at the far end of Mangrove Street. His ruddy face darkened and the twirling night stick stopped in mid air and fell to his side. The explosion of the shotgun against the night came clear and loud from the row of cheap cottages along Fox Creek.

O'Sheen crossed Mangrove at a dog trot, trying as he ran to determine from where the shot had come. Lights

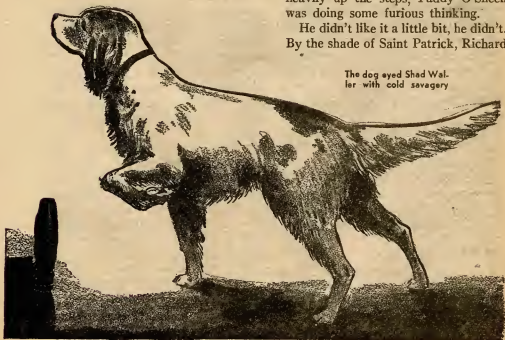
were flashing on down the street. The *bump bump* of Shad Waller's wooden leg sounded sharply against the frost-covered sidewalk.

"Officer O'Sheen! Down here! Quick!" Shad ran toward the stout cop as fast as his stiff leg would allow. "It's Richard. He's gone and killed himself."

Paddy was winded. He didn't speak, but followed Shad back toward the little one story, frame cottage in which the two old men had always kept bachelor's haven. As he pounded heavily up the steps, Paddy O'Sheen was doing some furious thinking.

He didn't like it a little bit, he didn't. By the shade of Saint Patrick, Richard

The dog eyed Shad Waller with cold savagery



Rand had always been a kindly, God-fearing man. Lazy perhaps, but with a love for his dog Pat, and a liking for the out of doors and hunting. By all the Saints, what would such a man be doing shooting himself?

Shad followed him into the tiny, dirty bedroom and stood by the door as Paddy O'Sheen bent over the still body of the man on the floor.

"Heard the shot from the kitchen," Shad said. His jaws were working at high speed and tobacco juice streaked from between heavy lips. Shad's shoulders were stooped forward as though this problem were too much for them to bear. "I can't for the life of me figure out why he done it."

Paddy O'Sheen's eyes darted over the shotgun, a twelve gauge that lay on the floor by the blood-covered corpse. There was a bloody, jagged hole in Richard Rand's chest, almost the size of a tea cup. O'Sheen looked away quickly, a soft Irish curse on his lips. Paddy O'Sheen didn't like violent death. It made him sick and angry inside.

"You run to the drug store right away, Shad," he said. "Tell the Chief to send the death wagon over. No use letting Richard lie here longer than need be."

Shad turned toward the outer door, hesitated and turned back again. His face was long and bewildered.

"Richard kinda complained of the distemper," he faltered. "I told him to get under the blankets and warm himself. Paddy, so help me I don't know. . . ."

Paddy nodded.

"Sure, and I understand how you feel, Shad. Don't go worrying about it. Can't do Richard no good now. Run along and I'll take care of things here."

Shad stumped out toward the porch and the rising voices as the door opened

told O'Sheen that a crowd had gathered.

HE STARTED a search of the room.

There was something missing. Something that Paddy couldn't quite put his thick finger on. The bed was torn up and the whole room was a mess. Not the kind of house his Marta kept, Paddy decided with a little smile.

Richard Rand's guns were on their hooks by the far wall. Richard loved his guns and his dog Pat above all else.

The dog, Pat!

That was it. Pat was missing. O'Sheen hadn't heard him bark, even when the shot was fired. Yet, Pat was dead loyal to Richard. The dog wouldn't go from the house or hunt, even with Shad Waller, not without Richard's permission.

"Glory be!" Paddy O'Sheen's lips moved soundlessly and he studied the rack of rifles and revolvers, fastened neatly against the wall.

Doc Hargreave's death wagon was coming now. It rounded the corner of Mangrove and Vine with a deep-throated roar. Brakes squealed and it halted outside. The sudden rise of voices again told Paddy that Doc Hargreave would know all about the death of Richard Rand before he entered the house.

It was nearly midnight. Paddy slipped out of the back door and stood in the cold, bright moonlight. The fields beyond the shaft of Fox Creek were dew covered and silvery under the silent light. Paddy O'Sheen remembered Richard's love for those fields and a sudden lump gathered in his throat.

The *bump bump* of Shad Waller's leg sounded against the frozen ground at the side of the house. The old man passed Paddy O'Sheen without a word, entered the kitchen and settled into his

chair by the iron-bellied stove. The front door slammed. Richard Rand would be going on his last ride. Paddy followed Shad into the kitchen and sat down opposite him.

For a long time neither of them spoke. Paddy heard the death wagon grind into low gear and draw away from the house. The lamp flickered and black smoke flickered up, sooting the chimney.

A faint bark sounded far away across the fields. Shad came forward in his chair, white hands with heavy blue veins showing as they clutched the chair arms.

"Sounds like Pat's coming home," Paddy O'Sheen said softly.

Shad grinned, and his teeth were brown with tobacco stain.

"Darned dog's been gone since morning," he said. "'Bout time he found his way home."

PADDY O'SHEEN came forward in his chair with visible effort, waiting. Minutes passed and the sullen expression on Shad Waller's face remained unchanged. The quick *pad pad* of heavy paws sounded against the rough boards of the porch. Pat, the English setter, was whining and scratching at the door. With the toe of his foot, Paddy O'Sheen reached out and kicked the door open. The dog bounced into the room with a happy bark, then stopped still, teeth bared at Shad Waller.

"Down!" Paddy said sharply.

Pat circled Shad slowly, and settled at Paddy's feet. He seemed to recognize Paddy O'Sheen's voice of authority. The dog was wet and a short length of rope hung from his neck. He started to whine softly, and his brown eyes were filled with tears.

Paddy loosened his service pistol from his holster and drew it out. He

balanced it carefully on one knee.

"Sorry, Shad!" he said. "I've been waiting for Pat. If he hadn't come back by himself, I'd have had to find him. As it is, things are a little easier."

Shad Waller sat very still, eyes narrowed. His eyes never wavered from the drawn gun.

"I don't know what you're aiming at," he said hoarsely. "You'd think I . . ."

"I'm aiming straight at your heart," Paddy answered coldly.

"You killed Richard, Shad. If you move out of that chair I'll fill you with lead so quick that Saint Patrick will roll over and cheer for the Irish all over again."

Shad was motionless, jaws tight set. "Prove it," he challenged. "They ain't many as know Richard and me didn't get along. I didn't have no reason to do away with him. You gotta say a lot more than that to put a scare into me."

O'SHEEN'S neck turned violent red. His trigger finger jumped with the nerves.

"You planned to kill Pat first," his voice was like ice. "You asked Richard if you could hunt Pat because that was the only way you could get him out of the house. Maybe you should have shot the dog after all."

Paddy went on. "You tied Pat in the woods and came back here to face Richard alone. You shot him in the chest at six feet and he never had a chance to fight back."

"You ain't talking sense," Shad growled.

"Did you ever try to hold a shotgun with the end of the barrel in your chest and the trigger where you could fire it?"

"Nope," Shad Waller grinned crookedly. "I ain't as big a fool as Richard was."

"You're a bigger one," O'Sheen said evenly. "It's possible to hold a shotgun that way, *by pressing the barrel tight against you*. The shot would leave a small hole the size of the end of the barrel. Shad, you blew a hole the size of a small dish. He couldn't have shot himself that way."

Shad staggered to his feet suddenly realizing the terrible manner in which he had betrayed himself. His eyes darted toward the still open door. Pat was up, hair stiff and fangs bared.

"Go on, Shad," O'Sheen said. "Run for it. I'll shoot you down before you take three steps."

Shad hesitated and sank back into his chair. His breath was coming out jerkily.

"I ain't running," he watched the dog as it stood there, waiting to spring.

"I shot Richard, but if it wasn't for the dang bullet hole. . . ."

Paddy O'Sheen chuckled.

"It's true, it is, that when I saw that wound, I knew it couldn't be suicide. I couldn't be sure you did it, Shad, until I remembered that Richard keeps Pat in the house during hunting season, and that no one ever hunts Pat except Richard and you. I guess Pat himself had a little to do with catching you, after all. You tied him somewhere while you killed Richard, then you went back and set him loose."

O'Sheen stood up, the big gun loose in his right hand. With his left, he stroked the fur around Pat's heavy neck.

"That's where he made his mistake, eh, Pat?"

THE END

THE RADIO BULLET DETECTOR

DECEMBER 7, 1941, is an unforgettable day in American history and it is also the day that a new device for aiding surgeons to reduce the hazards of war was first tried out under actual war conditions.

This device is a radio bullet and shrapnel locator designed by Col. John J. Moorhead, of the U. S. Army, a well-known New York surgeon. Dr. Moorhead was giving a lecture before a group of surgeons in Honolulu on that terrible Sunday when the Japs started their infamous attack. His device was immediately pressed into service by the surgeons attending the wounded in Honolulu in twenty cases to locate bullets or steel. They were all quick to praise the new device

and declared it far superior in speed and accuracy over the old method for locating bullets.

It works on the same principle used to find underground metals but on a reduced scale. It consists of a radio-tube oscillating circuit with a small loop. When metal is in the close vicinity of the device, the currents induced in the metal move the needle of the instrument. The loop is moved around until the strongest deflection is obtained and this locates the exact position of the bullet or shrapnel.

If results with this device are as successful on other battlefronts as they were at Honolulu, many lives will be saved and much needless pain abolished.

—Lee Sands.

ENLISTMENT OF PROBATIONERS

APRESENT day controversy exists as to whether probationers should be allowed to enlist in the armed forces. Many of them have been reclassified 1-A. They know they will be drafted in time, but prefer to enlist in the branch of service they prefer. Several have applied at the Army, Navy and Marine recruiting offices, only to be turned down. This leaves a very depressing and rebellious effect on many of

them.

The majority of young probated men are loyal Americans. Offered the opportunity to return to their home and society and be accepted they feel unwanted and ostracized when the armed forces, a vital branch of our society, rejects them. Obviously eligibility for enlistment would provide them with a higher morale and make them better fighters.

—James Liggett.

DEATH CONFESSES JUDGMENT

By WILLIAM BRENGLE

**There are two clues to the solution of this
short mystery story. Can you detect them?
When you know the answer check on page 305**

RUDMIRE sat slumped on a chair in his living-room, his shoulders shaking with grief. The body of a woman lay sprawled on the couch across from him, her face covered by one corner of a blanket placed there by Lieutenant Davis.

Detective Mulvane, compassion in his expression, looked down at Rudmire's bowed head. "I understand what a shock this has been to you," he said kindly, "but right now speed is important. The sooner we know the details, the quicker we can get to work."

The man raised his haggard face and used a forefinger to clear his thick-lensed glasses of sweat and tear stains.

"Paul Morton did it," he said thickly. "I caught him in the act. He had been here earlier this evening, begging Mary, my wife, not to force him into bankruptcy. She owned the business block where Morton has his restaurant. He had paid no rent in several months, and Mary was preparing to confess judgment tomorrow. They quarreled bitterly before he finally stalked out after threatening to 'get' her if she made trouble.

"That was a little after nine o'clock—hardly more than an hour ago. Mary complained of a headache—nervous strain, probably—and I turned out all lights except a small one in the dining room, then went into the bathroom. I had just finished washing my face and was reaching for a towel when I heard a muffled cry. I immediately jerked open the bathroom door and looked along the hall into the living-room."

"Go on," Mulvane prompted gently.

"It was horrible! Mary lay face down on the sofa with Morton kneeling over her, his gloved hands about her throat, the most insane expression twisting his face."

Mulvane said, "What did you do, then?"

"I yelled," Rudmire said grimly, "and ran to stop him. Morton, warned by my cry, dashed for the front door. I might have caught him, but he grabbed that little telephone chair you saw in the reception hall and threw it at my feet, upsetting me. By the time I had risen and replaced the chair, he was gone. Then I tried to

revive Mary but she was d-dead . . ." His voice trailed off and his head drooped wearily forward.

Mulvane motioned to one of his men. "See what you can turn up in the way of fingerprints, Sid. Just the living-room and hall."

"But, Mulvane," interposed Lieutenant Davis, "Morton was wearing gloves."

"Right. But with all his activity he might have split a seam in one of the fingers. Even *part* of a print would strengthen matters."

A few minutes later, Sid made his report. "Sorry, Mulvane. Not a print other than a few left by Mr. Rudmire and his wife on two lamps, one end table, an ash tray and the telephone."

Detective Mulvane nodded. "Come with us to headquarters, Mr. Rudmire. I've sent for Morton; he'll be there by the time we arrive—unless he's skipped out altogether."

At the station, they found Morton, puzzled and indignant at being taken into custody. When Rudmire had repeated his charges and identification, the burly restaurant owner bellowed a denial and attempted to attack the husband of the dead woman.

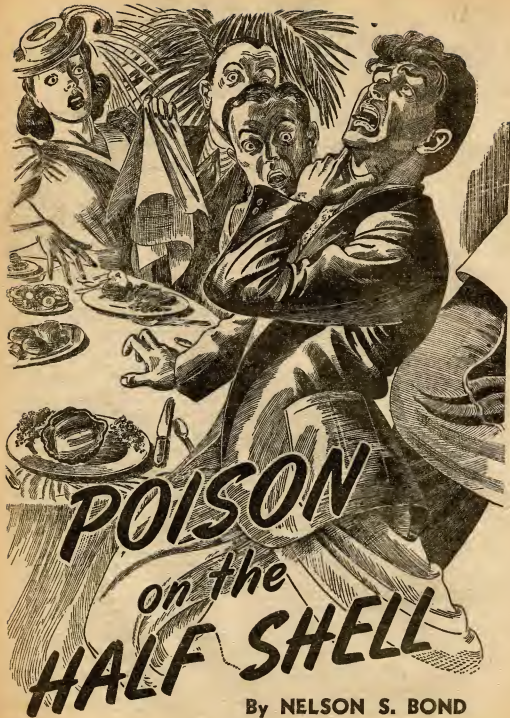
They managed, finally, to calm Morton sufficiently to gain an admission that he had been at the Rudmire home around nine that evening, and that he and Mrs. Rudmire had "had words."

"But," he concluded savagely, "she was alive when I left and I did not go back. Rudmire has handed you a pack of lies."

Detective Mulvane leaned back in his chair and gazed meditatively at the ceiling. He said quietly, "We don't need your denial, Morton. You didn't kill her."

Lieutenant Davis' jaw sagged. "How can you say that, Mulvane? Rudmire has made a positive identification. You heard Morton admit he was there at nine; that he quarreled with the woman."

"True," Mulvane admitted. "But Rudmire tried too hard. He wanted to make the case against Morton iron clad. As a result, his story contains two very glaring errors. And those two errors will burn Rudmire—not Morton."



By NELSON S. BOND



Frome Thrasher rose to his feet, eyes wild, clutched at his throat, and died

It was neat the way Thrasher died: loads of poison all over his oysters. Mystery was one word that didn't fit this case!

THE name of the place was Café Montmartre. The red neon letters that said so alternated with large green letters that spelled PIERRE'S. Broadway thought Pierre owned the Café Montmartre . . . but he didn't. The real owner was Frome R. Thrasher, speculator, playboy, investment broker—and heel.

Frome Thrasher loved to play Big Shot. Nothing pleased him more than to step down from his gleaming town-car and wave dinner guests before him through the marquee of *his* night-club.

He did so, on this particular evening, with characteristically grandiloquent aplomb.

The Montmartre was crowded, but somehow the doorman and hatcheck girl found time to take care of Thrasher's party immediately. It was noisy, but Pierre himself heard of the new arrivals and hastened to place them at the most desirable table on the floor. It was busy, but somehow word reached the chef that this group must receive extra-special attention; a waiter was assigned solely to Thrasher's group;

the floorshow routine was altered so glamorous Dolores Mendoza might grace the party with her charms.

Frome Thrasher was in his glory. He felt all eyes upon him, and his shirt front literally crackled with pride. He was, he felt, a Big Shot. A Man-About-Town. An Important Figure. He was—

He was a damned fool. Fifteen minutes later, Frome Thrasher was dead.

AT MIDNIGHT, H. Q. was full of noise and smoke and newspapermen and conversation and Holswade.

Mostly Holswade. For wherever Bud Holswade tossed his kelly over a peg, there was always plenty of noise and smoke and conversation—by Holswade. Right now, cheeks puffed with laughter, he was spluttering the climax of his latest tale around the belly of a fat, malodorous cigar.

"So then," he chuckled, "Oliver, here, pipes up an' says, says he—"

Douglas Cromwell said plaintively, "Please, Bud! If you don't mind. Don't call me 'Oliver.'"

"Oliver, here," continued Holswade imperturbably, "takes one gloop at the stiff an' says, 'Ah, murdered!' Now I ask you, ain't that a whipper? 'Ah, murdered!' he says—like he just found a bug in a raspberry. An' all the time, I've got the guy that done it standin' in the room outside. With cuffs on!"

He paused, stifled by his own smoke and laughter. One or two of the newshounds laughed politely. They were the old-timers. The boys who recognized that even though Holswade was a big blowhard and a damned nuisance with his dreary, unhumorous, sometimes, offensively sarcastic tales concerning the mishaps of fellow officers, he was a capable dick. Also the root-source of much information. So they laughed politely.

But one youngster didn't. He looked at the quiet little man, Cromwell; then at Holswade. And he said, "Seems to me that was pretty clever of him. You said yourself the killer had framed the job to look like suicide. And you got tipped by a stool. How come Cromwell knew it was murder?"

Douglas Cromwell threw his intercessor a grateful glance. He began meekly, "Well, it was the shoelaces. When a man ties his own—"

But Holswade snorted.

"Clever! It's a cinch *you* ain't been coverin' the H. Q. beat very long, kid. Else you'd know by now that it ain't cleverness that pays off in this racket. It's hard work an' organization.

"You been readin' too many of them detective books, like Oliver, here. He thinks detectin' is like workin' out jigsaw puzzles or somethin'. When as a matter of fact—"

Astonishingly, Douglas Cromwell spoke up on his own behalf. It was an unprecedented bit of rebellion. During his first six months on the Homicide Squad he had swallowed without protest the gibes of the older Holswade, even on occasions when they had been obviously undeserved. But this flicker of interest in his own working methods roused an unsuspected spark in him.

He said, "As a matter of fact, this department might crack many of its cases in half as much time if every man in it were trained to be observant. Unfortunately most of them believe, like Mr. Holswade here, that the best way to solve a murder is to throw out a lot of stools, get a lot of suspects, and browbeat them until they get a lead.

"It's the little things that count, really. One small, isolated fact, recognizable out of place—"

HE HAD allowed his rebellion to carry him too far. Now, suddenly,

he realized that, seeing the darkness gather on Holswade's brow, sensing the uncomfortable reactions of the gathered newsmen. He stopped. Holswade asked caustically, "You all through, Oliver?"

Cromwell nodded mutely.

"Good. I was wonderin' when you was goin' to get done runnin' off at the mouth. I think maybe the Captain'd like to know you don't approve of the way the department's bein' run."

Cromwell said nothing. There was nothing to say. But he knew very well that if an account of his outburst were to reach the ears of tough old Captain Gorsline, in two minutes flat *he* would be—to paraphrase his own final words—"one small, isolated detective, recognizably out of a job."

"And I think," drawled Holswade, rising, "maybe I ought to have a little talk with the Cap—"

It was at this minute that Desk-Sergeant Harrigan bellowed from the adjacent Night Court, "Hey! Hey, you guys in there! Holswade. Cromwell. Grab a wagon. A guy just pulled a floppo at the Café Montmartre!"

THE Café Montmartre was seething with excitement. Its seething was like that of a beehive, the entrance having been sealed by the beekeeper's plug. All humming confusion inside, no movement through the door, only a handful of curious people outside asking each other what the hell.

The plug of the human beehive was Patrolman Jiggs Donovan. He breathed a sigh of relief as the two plainclads made their appearance, mopped his brow and said, "Boy, am I glad you're here? A couple more minutes and them monkeys inside woulda busted down the door on me."

Holswade asked, "Then everyone's still inside who was there when it hap-

pened?"

"Yep. Unless they flew out. Nobody got past me, and Tom Balderston's at the only other door, out back. Hey, you! Where do you think you're going?"

A middle aged man in evening clothes abandoned his efforts to push through the revolving door. He said pettishly, "I've told you three times, officer, I must get into the club. A group of friends are waiting for me. I'm late now. They'll be wondering—"

"And I told *you* three times," said Donovan, "there ain't nobody going in or out. Your friends got other things to wonder about. Now, git!"

"I'll have you understand," protested the man, "I am a respectable citizen. I pay taxes. It's my privilege to go where I please. I demand—"

Bud Holswade said wearily, "Oh, shut up, you! All right, Jiggs, let him in with us. It's his funeral. Serves him right if we have to keep 'em all in the clink overnight. Open up."

Donovan eased his bulk from the door. Immediately the tripartite frame began to spin. For some seconds the cop was kept busy thrusting back would-be exiters while Holswade and Cromwell, along with the indignant taxpayer, effected an entrance. Then he settled back against the door, muttering imprecations on café crawlers who croaked at midnight when an honest, hard-working copper was scheduled to go off duty.

Inside, Holswade turned to Cromwell. "It ain't my askin', Oliver, that we're on this case together. But since we are, I'm warnin' you—keep your yap shut. I stood plenty out of you tonight. I ain't quite decided whether to tell Cap what you said, but one crack out of you—"

Then the manager was beside them, wailing despair.

"*Messieurs, je vous prie*—she can be 'ushed up, this *affaire si doloieux, n'est-ce pas?* That it should 'appen in the Café Montmartre I am grieve. Even yet I do not hunderstan'. Nevaire before 'as such an accident—"

Bud shook him off. "The stiff, Frenchy, the stiff. Where is it? An' who done it?"

THE first question was unnecessary.

There was but one spot in the room unoccupied by the milling crowd, a wide circle from which all had drawn back. Toward this spot the detectives moved. But Holswade's second query brought a gasp from Pierre.

"*Mais, non, m'sieu! Vous ne comprenez point!* It was no *person* who killed M. Thrasher! It was the oysters—the so-bad oysters!"

Holswade stopped in his tracks, staring.

"What? I thought this was a killing?"

Cromwell said mildly, "Nobody said so, Bud. They just said somebody died. They didn't say it was murder."

"Then what the hell are *we* doin' here? Ain't we got enough to do with-out—"

"But," continued Doug Cromwell, "it *was* a murder." He had been staring at the body of the dead Thrasher. "He was poisoned. And it wasn't any oysters that did it."

Thrasher's body was not a pleasant sight. It lay a few yards from the table at which his party had been seated. Rigor mortis had tensed his frame into an awkward arch; violent convulsions strained him backward until his weight rested almost entirely on his head and heels. His eyes were glazed, wide, staring, mirroring a moment of frightful fear. Hooked fingers still furrowed his plump, discolored throat.

Bud Holswade expelled his breath in a satisfied, "Oh! So it was poison, huh? Well, whoever done it is still in this room. One of them arsenic bugs or somethin'—"

"Not arsenic," corrected Cromwell apologetically, "Strychnine, I believe. Spastic convulsions accompanied by opisthotonism—" He coughed mildly. "That means arching of the spine."

Holswade glared at him. "Okay, professor. Never mind the opus-what-ever-it-is. Strychnine, then. We'll have the lab check on that. *My* job is to find out who done it." He raised his voice, addressing the room at large. "All you folks go sit where you was when this happened. An' any of you that knew this guy or was near him to-night, I want to see you especially. Over here."

There was one thing Doug Cromwell had to give Bud Holswade. He knew how to handle a crowd. With the arrival of the detectives, the awed restraint that had held back the crowd from the dead man had disappeared. Now, all morbidly curious, they were pressing forward to see that which, a few minutes before, had sent them into shuddering panic. Thrasher's table, as well as his body, was ringed about with wide-eyed spectators.

Holswade stepped in to break it up. He shoved back two women and a man with indiscriminate roughness, then paused at sight of a middle-aged man in evening clothes, who was hovering behind the dead man's chair.

"You again!" roared Holswade. "Well, now what?"

The man who had accompanied them into the nightclub said rockily, "But—this is terrible! I had no idea—"

"You led with your chin," grinned Holswade, "when you insisted on comin' in here. Now get back and stay back. Find them friends you was talk-

in' about, an' sit down."

The man wailed, "But that's just it! This *is* my party! And Mr. Thrasher was to have been my host!"

"In that case," said Holswade, "you better settle down for a long stay. Hey, Frenchy—are these people the ones that were at Thrasher's table?"

"*Qui, m'sieu*. The ladies and gentlemen standing by the table. But there mus' be some mistake. M. Thrasher had been in the Club but a few minutes. Not more than fifteen. In that so-small time, *sûrement* no one could 'ave—"

DOUG CROMWELL said abstractedly, "Strychnine is a quickie." He had wandered to the chair at the head of the table. Now he bent his head, sniffing the platter before Thrasher's place. "Yep, that's it. Strychnine. In the oysters. Smell."

"I'm a dick," said Holswade coldly, "Not a bloodhound. Okay, you that was in Thrasher's party; I want to talk to you in a private room. The rest of you—" Again he addressed the room in general. "You can go now. But leave your names an' addresses with the cop at the door. An' don't try to skip town. We might need some of you for witnessses, or somethin'!"

His tone implied that any or all of them might be drafted for later first person duty on the gallows. The mob stirred feverishly toward the exit. Pierre plucked Holswade by the elbow.

"Pardon, m'sieu. But myself and my employees? Is it permitted that we leave?"

"You was at Thrasher's table, wasn't you?"

"But for a so-short moment. When his party came."

"Then stick around. An' any waiters that was near him, too. The rest can go."

Cromwell said, "Bud . . . all ex-

cept . . ."

"Except who, Oliver?"

"The chef. It's possible that he—"

Holswade said hotly, "You forgettin' what I said? Don't be so damned impatient. I was just gettin' ready to send for the chef. I'm runnin' this case!"

Cromwell said meekly, "Yes, Bud."

THREE-QUARTERS of an hour later, Bud Holswade most heartily wished he were *not* "runnin' this case." As a matter of fact, he wasn't. The case was running itself—right up a blind alley!

Worse than that. A blind alley is an avenue that goes nowhere. This case went everywhere! Bud Holswade had succeeded in getting some information out of the nine people locked in the small, private room with him and Cromwell, but this information tended only to confuse matters!

Even Doug Cromwell had to concede that. Even Doug Cromwell who admired deductive detection, and who eagerly devoured crime fiction in which the clues were tangled webs. But this case wasn't running true to form. In the books of which Cromwell was so fond, it was customary for every suspect to claim vehement friendship for the slain man. From what he and Holswade had learned so far, however, it appeared that almost every member of this group of suspects would have enjoyed nothing better than the contribution of flowers to Thrasher's funeral wreath!

There were nine in the group Holswade had collected for questioning. Of these, three were members of the café staff; Pierre Rochelle, the manager; Henri LeBrun, the young waiter who had been assigned to Thrasher's party; Jean Duval, the chef. Three others were male guests. That perennially juvenile playboy, Theodore ("Teddy") Baer; Thébault Monet, masculine half

of the dance team, Mendoza & Monet; and the rattled "tax-payer" who had belatedly forced his way into the affair, Duncan Slade.

The fair sex was also represented by three members. Francine O'Dea, a showgirl now "at liberty" but recently of the chorus of *Tropical Tidbits*. In that production the curvaceous redhead had nightly simulated, to the delight of her audiences, a striking—and unclad—dread of voodoo worship. Now, actually frightened by the circumstances in which she found herself, she was doing a better job of it.

The second girl was Jacqueline Marsh, current radio sensation whose torch singing had catapulted her into public favor. Her pale-haired beauty was of the lavender-and-old-lace variety. The only sign of her excitement was the firm grip she maintained on the arm of her handsome escort, young Baer.

Dolores Mendoza, last of the feminine triumvirate, was outspokenly resentful of what she called, "Zees t'eatrics!" She had been summoned to Thrasher's table, claimed she, because he was a wealthy patron who must be played up to. She saw no reason why she should be questioned. It was none of her affair. Moreover—

"Moreover," interrupted Holswade savagely, "you go fly a kite! I suppose you didn't like this guy either?"

The shoulders of the glamorous Dolores rose, fell, like soft crests of cream. "Ee was a boom!"

"A what?"

"She means," interpreted Doug, "a bum."

Holswade scowled at him. "I know what she means, Oliver. Now, it's a damn sure thing *one* of you shoveled the strychnine onto Thrasher's plate. You might as well come clean, because if you don't—"

HE WENT on talking. Cromwell went on thinking. A mess, that's what it was. Frome Thrasher had not made it easier for the police to apprehend his murderer by surrounding himself with a group of people who, to the last man, appeared to have hated his guts.

Baer, for instance. Upon questioning, the young playboy had frankly admitted his unwillingness to be Frome Thrasher's guest. "I came tonight because I damned well had to. I was—am—in debt to Thrasher. He was a social climber. The interest he demanded of my indebtedness was that, upon demand, I should be a member of his little parties.

"Beside—" This with a protective arm about the radio lark, Jacky Marsh, "He was a louse with women. Never could keep his paws off anything in skirts."

Holswade had slanted a wise eye at the girl. "He made passes at you?"

She flushed and nodded. Corroboration came unsolicited from the showgirl, Francine O'Dea. "He made passes at everyone, glasses or not. I'll tell you now, because you'll only learn it later and hold it against me—I had a row with Thrasher, publicly, less than a week ago. I said some pretty rash things."

"Yeah? What was the row about?"

"Her." Francine pointed to Dolores Mendoza. "He was on the make for her. That was one reason for tonight's party; he wanted to see her again. She—" This last with a baleful glance. "She wasn't exactly frigid to him either."

"That," Monet interjected excitedly, "is not true. He would not have dared. And as for Dolores—"

"How come you know all about it?"

The wiry dancer drew himself up taut. "I should. 'Mendoza' is my

wife's dancing name."

"So?" Bud Holswade said—and jotted another note in his book.

To add to the confusion, Duncan Slade came out with a free admission that the death of Frome Thrasher was a great relief to him. "Among other things," he said, "Thrasher was an investment broker. My investment broker. As such, he had succeeded in assuming a voting control over my business—the leather business, if it matters.

"He had recently negotiated for a sale of my concern. Forty thousand dollars was the figure agreed upon. I begged him not to sell me out. That figure—"

"It ain't hay," said Holswade.

"But it would have ruined me, for Thrasher would have pocketed the lion's share of the money. Moreover, the current war has boomed the leather trade. In a very few months, had he allowed me to go on with things as they are, I could have repaid my obligations to him, become solvent again—"

Holswade said bleakly, "You're talkin' a swell case against yourself, guy."

BUT the man smiled nervously. "Hardly. You know yourself that Thrasher was murdered before I even got here. I envy the murderer his success, and I'd like to say to him right now that I thank him—"

"That'll do!" rapped Holswade. And he went on with his questioning. The three staff members. Pierre. Manager of the café. "*Mais, oui, m'sieu*, M. Thrasher's death shocks me, but it is financially profitable. I will become owner, now, of the Montmartre—"

"That makes seven of you," grunted Bud. "And you, Duval?"

The roly-poly little chef wrung his hands. "*Non, m'sieu*. I did not even know M. Thrasher. I swear I had nozing to do with 'is death. Nor did anyone in my kitchen. I will be ruin' if

this is made public."

Doug Cromwell's eyes narrowed. He glanced at the chef's stainless white apron, his cockaded hat. Nothing like a good old "least likely suspect" to make things interesting. He saw the swift look that passed between Duval and Pierre.

"And you?" Holswade turned to the waiter at last. "Your name's—" He squinted at his notes. "Ong-ree LeBrun?"

"Yes, sir."

Cromwell looked up, surprised. He studied the lad's face for a minute, then, "You mean, I believe, Henry Brown? Isn't that it?"

LeBrun colored. He glanced helplessly at Pierre. He nodded. "Yes, sir."

Bud Holswade demanded, "What's goin' on here?"

Cromwell said, "He's not French, that's all. He just changed his name to the French form. But why, son?"

Young Brown said, "It's the policy of the café—all the waiters who are not French take French names. M. Pierre will tell you—"

But Duncan Slade's eyebrows had contracted at the name. Now he interjected, curiously, "Henry Brown? You're not by any chance Henry Brown, *Junior*, are you?"

Brown stammered, "I—I—"

"Why?" Bud wanted to know. "What difference does it make?"

"Why, probably none at all. But I couldn't help noting the similarity of names. Thrasher was responsible for the financial failure of the Brown Investment Corporation a few years ago. It was a tricky piece of work. Brown committed suicide after—"

"Are you," demanded Holswade, any relation to the Brown Thrasher ruined?"

The waiter nodded, pale. "He was

my father."

IT CAME, then, all of a sudden, and just as Douglas Cromwell had hoped it might. Recognition of that for which he had been seeking ever since the beginning. A "small, isolated fact, recognizably out of place—"

Thinking back, coupling it with one or two other things he had noticed, it began to look possible. More than that, probable. But there were so many parts of the jigsaw that didn't yet fit together.

He said, Bud—"?" He said it in a mild, a meeky-mousy tone of voice. He wasn't afraid of Bud. But he knew that unless he did adopt that tone, Holswade would get his back up.

"Yeah?"

"Bud, a little while ago you were asking Miss O'Dea about the event preceding the murder. I don't believe she finished."

Francine O'Dea corrected, "Oh, but I did finish. As I said, there really isn't much to tell. Frome came by for each of us in his town car. He liked to do things that way, you know. The Big Shot. The Perfect Host.

"I think he must have picked up Miss Marsh and Ted first; anyway, they were in the car when he stopped for me. We went by for Slade, then, but he wasn't ready yet. So we came on without him. Of course Miss Mendoza and Mr. Monet joined us after we arrived—"

"And after you entered the club," asked Cromwell, "was everything perfectly normal? I mean, did Thrasher appear to be in perfect health? Was he all right until after he ate the oysters?"

"Yes. Perfectly all right. He was gay and feeling very chipper. Until, of course, after he ate the oysters. Almost immediately he pushed back from

the table. A most horrible look in his eyes. He seemed to be trying to speak, but the words wouldn't come.

"Someone—I think it was Miss Marsh—reached out and touched his arm. The moment she did so—"

She shuddered, faltered into silence. Doug nodded.

"I know. That's another characteristic of strychnine poisoning. The mere touch of a hand is sufficient to induce convulsions." He seemed disappointed. "But you're sure he was in perfect health until that time? He complained of nothing?"

"Not a thing."

"How about that, you others?" Cromwell searched them feverishly with his eyes. He had to be right. He knew he was. But if no one could help him out—

THE young waiter, Henry Brown, said, "He did make one small complaint, sir. But it was of no significance."

"What was that?"

"Just as he and his party sat down at the table he motioned for me to close the window behind him."

"He did? Did he say why?"

"I really don't know, sir. I went immediately to the window—"

Jacky Marsh said, "I remember him saying that. He said he had a stiff neck, I believe. Yes, that's it. You remember, Teddy?"

Baer nodded. "That's right, he did complain of a stiff neck. To tell you the truth, I hadn't thought of it. Because Thrasher was a bit of a hypochondriac anyway. He always was pampering some ailment, real or imaginary. He was a perfect sucker for any quack nostrum; headache powders, pills, soothing syrups—"

Bud Holswade broke in, "Listen, this ain't gettin' us nowhere. If you

want to talk about Thrasher's health, Oliver, go hold your organ recital somewhere else. I got a case to crack."

"You've got a—" Douglas Cromwell laughed aloud. Belligerently. Defiantly. "You thick-skulled flatfoot, go ahead with your questioning. Waste all the time you want to. This case is already cracked!"

"Already—*What!*"

"Yes. And the murderer proved he was no smarter than most murderers by pulling the oldest phony of all—hinting around so we'd pin it on another person.

"The thing that threw us off was the strychnine on those oysters. It didn't belong there at all—except as a blind. Thrasher wasn't murdered in the Café Montmartre. He was a walking dead man when he entered the club."

Holswade's face was mottled with rage and incomprehension. "Are you crazy? What do you mean, a walking dead man? How can you—"

"Didn't you hear Miss Marsh? Thrasher complained of a 'stiff neck' immediately after entering the café. And a tight, stiff feeling at the nape of the neck is the very first symptom experienced by nine out of ten strychnine victims. In other words, Thrasher had already been poisoned on his way here! Before he even entered the club!"

Cromwell paused significantly. "And thus," he said, "our suspects are cut down to four people! Mr. Baer . . . Miss Marsh . . . Miss O'Dea or Mr. Slade!"

"An' only three of them," broke in Holswade, "was in the automobile with him. O.K. We'll sweat a confession out of the guilty one at H.Q. Come along, you—"

"Wait a minute! There's no need for that. I *know* the answer. All I need is corroboration of my theory. Miss O'Dea has told us Thrasher liked

to play the Big Shot. Call for each of his guests at their door. Therefore, we may presume he left the others in the car . . . and ran up alone to Mr. Slade's apartment when they stopped there. Is that right?"

Francine O'Dea nodded. "W-why, yes! But—"

"And how long would you say he was gone?"

"About five minutes. Surely no longer."

SLADE'S voice quavered. "Now . . . wait a minute, sir! There must be some mistake. After all, there *was* strychnine on the oysters . . ."

"You bet there was. You saw to that. When Frome Thrasher came to your apartment, you met him, told him you weren't quite ready yet. Told him to go along and you'd join him in a little while—right?"

"Why—why, yes. That's how it happened—"

"And that was your alibi! You didn't want to be on deck when Thrasher died. Oh, no! You wanted to be *outside* the club entirely so that afterward you would have witnesses—how many times did you make yourself a nuisance to the cop at the door, three?—that you had entered later.

"While Thrasher was at your apartment you showed him a new 'stomach tablet' or 'headache powder' or something of the kind, didn't you, Slade? You knew, as these others know, that he was a sucker for nostrums. That he'd take it down. And actually this new medicine you gave him was a strychnine capsule, so thickly coated that it would take a half hour or so to dissolve and get in its licks!"

Slade protested, "It—it's not so! You can't prove any such fantastic thing. I—"

"Stand still, you!" shouted Hols-

wade. He looked at Cromwell curiously, but still unconvinced. "He's right, Oliv—Doug. It ain't reasonable. Why should he want to get into the club at all? Why not stay home, if he done the killing, and let somebody else take the rap?"

"That was the best part of it. He *had* to be here to establish the murder method. To pour some more of that strychnine on the oysters, so that everyone would know that was how Thrasher had been killed!

"And—" Cromwell spun to face the now ashen Slade. "It was this ingenious afterthought that is going to prove my theory right. Slade—where is the phial from which you poured the strychnine? It must still be in your pocket!"

Slade squealed then, a fearful, piteous mewling noise; turned and tried for the door. But he never made it. Holswade was graced with muscles

that moved faster than his mind. He made a flying tackle that nabbed the killer in midflight. Arms and legs tangled on the floor; out of the tangle rose Holswade, grinning, left wrist locked to Slade's right, right hand clutching the glass tube Duncan Slade had never found the time nor place to dispose of.

And, "I guess maybe you better call the wagon," said Bud Holswade. "We got this in the bag, Oliv—" He stopped short. That was the second time now. And Douglas Cromwell knew that there'd be no report made to Cap Gorsline. Knew, also, that maybe it was going to be sort of nice working with Holswade in the future.

Well, he too could afford to make concessions. He grinned. "That's okay," he said. "Call me that if you want to. Oliver's not such a bad name, after all."

THE END

PRISONERS WHO WANT TO AID WAR EFFORT

JAMES V. BENNETT, Director of the United States Bureau of Prisons, recently made public a letter from one hundred and thirty seven prisoners in the U. S. Penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas. In it the prisoners have asked the Federal Government to send them to the jungles of Brazil to grow a new supply of rubber for America. The prisoners wrote that they were wholly aware of the dangers of the climate and realized that few white people survived it. However they stated that each of them felt "he would rather die gathering rubber in the jungles helping towards victory for our nation than to live in prison while others fight and work to save our country."

To quote part of the letter—

"We believe that the mistakes made during our lives, and which according to law caused incarceration, have in no way lessened our loyalty to the United States, or our right to defend it. Our past acts, that were at variance with the statutes, now, in time of war, are comparable to a family dispute. We believe that these differences should be laid aside, at least temporarily, for in true American style quarrels are forgiven between

family members when acts of aggression are made against family rights.

"We are Americans who realize our rashness in the past is depriving us of the opportunity to fight or work for the protection of our country against its enemies. That rashness can now fulfill a task in some quarter of the war program, enabling us to regain self respect for our families, friends, and society.

"In every crisis, in science or in war, some one or group of Americans have risen to volunteer for service knowing that death was the probable result. We expect no acknowledged glory for the service we are about to suggest, even knowing many fail to survive the climate and disease of tropical jungles. All we expect is the satisfaction our immediate families will have, and to know we have in some small manner compensated for the errors made against society."

Mr. Bennett described the letter from the Leavenworth prisoners as only one of the many sincere and dramatic offers of service made by thousands of prisoners throughout the country. Hundreds of prisoners in Oklahoma and Ohio penitentiaries are already drilling in future usefulness to the American army.

—Leonard Reiff.

THE MAN BEHIND "BABY FACE" NELSON

By ALEXANDER BLADE

JOHNN PAUL CHASE had been an ordinary young man with the chances of the average person. His parents, originally from Omaha, were neither rich nor poor. They had come to California in 1901, during which year John Paul had been born. He had gone to school until the fifth grade, then worked at odd jobs, which included everything from that of ranch-hoy to chauffeur for a Reno gambler and machinist helper in railroad shops. In 1926 he lost the latter job, but there is no evidence that it created an emergency. This was a time of prosperity and this goodlooking, dark-eyed, dark-haired young man could easily have found another position. Instead, he aligned himself with a local bootlegger who, it was rumored, "was in with the big shots."

The only vocation to which Chase ever gave diligent allegiance was that of criminality. Eventually he became a guard for a big liquor ring, smuggling shipments along the coast into San Francisco. Soon he gained a companion known as "Jimmy Bunett."

This person was short, blue-eyed, light-haired and so boyish-appearing that Chase's companions joked about the fact that the liquor business had gone to robbing the cradle. Chase made no remarks. He held a secret which almost overwhelmed him. This "Jimmy Bunett" had made a confidant of this partner. John Paul Chase knew exactly why he was there, why he had come alone and worked for some time before sending for his wife, Helen Gillis, and their baby. Then at last another discovered the secret and made it common knowledge. A fellow worker named Fatso Negri recognized a "wanted" picture in a detective magazine and showed it to everyone who cared to see. "Jimmy Bunett," his wife and baby, disappeared overnight, for he was Baby Face Nelson, at that time a recently escaped prisoner from Joliet Penitentiary, Illinois, after a second sentence for bank robbery.

Time passed and Baby Face Nelson returned and engaged Chase for what might be called a business agent, to be depended upon as purchasing man, messenger, contact representative and hideout finder. This required someone who could pose as an honest citizen.

Chase acted as "front man" in the purchase of a car for Nelson. Following this Chase drove Nelson, his wife, baby, and her mother to Minneapolis and rented an apartment. Here Chase was introduced to the murderers, bank robbers, hijackers and holdup men of Baby Face Nelson's gang.

Baby Face Nelson made a hurried getaway from Minneapolis after killing a citizen of that city, Theodore W. Kidder. The morning editions

had carried a description of the slayer, his wife and baby, plus the number of the murder car: California license 6-H-475. In the days that followed, headlines screamed the name of Baby Face Nelson. The license had been checked in California, and the name James Rogers had been traced down to the revelation that Baby Face Nelson in the company of an inconsequential bootlegger had bought the car. Chase was forgotten in the transaction; his name did not even appear in the scareheads which proclaimed the "cleverness" with which the killer eluded pursuit. Watchful officers knew nothing of the personality who made that "elusiveness" possible. That person was Chase. He was the true factor of escape as the quartet raced across America toward Bremerton, Washington, where the baby was to be left with a sister of Helen Gillis. Chase did all the driving, purchased all the food, gas, and oil and found tourist camps for safety. They reached Bremerton safely and left the child there.

And so it was time after time—John Paul Chase, faithful and loyal agent, protecting and watching out for Baby Face Nelson and his wife, buying ammunition, furnishing license plates, getting layoffs of banks, ordering steel vests, finding safe hideouts—always keeping on the go! Always on the look-out!

In the afternoon of a cold November day, Baby Face Nelson, his ever-present wife, and the yes-man, John Paul Chase, drove along the highway which reached from a certain lake resort near Chicago. A federal agent car passed them and the jittery Nelson ordered Chase to "let 'em have it!"

In the battle that ensued Nelson was fatally wounded and Inspector Cowley was killed by Chase.

Special agent Herman E. Hollis also fell, mortally wounded, before the machine gun in the desperate hands of Nelson.

Baby Face Nelson died that night in the home of a small town politician nearby.

Still there was no mention of John Paul Chase's name in the newspapers. However, when he tried to contact old friends, the story changed. "You're done for," they snapped. "Stay away from us." All avenues were closed to him. Only one possible haven was left. Years ago he had worked for a short time at the California State Hatchery at Mount Shasta. As soon as he appeared at the Fish Hatchery the F.B.I. had his man. Local officers warned beforehand by special agents had placed him under arrest the next day. His trial was only one of many—John Paul Chase was condemned to prison for life at Alcatraz Penitentiary.



Give THE GUY A CHANCE

by

THOMAS THURSDAY

WARDEN John Crane's talk to the departing Jimmy Gaylor—No. 26974—was short, practical and fatherly.

"Jimmy," he said, "every man who serves his term and leaves this institution goes out with a smear on his character. I like to believe—and I know I *hope*—that their stay here has proved to them that crime does *not* pay, never *has* paid, and never *will* pay."

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy Gaylor, standing erect before him.

"Outside, Jimmy, you will find it difficult to get employment," went on the gray-templed warden. "You will have a hard task in making a place in the world. But, please, Jimmy—take the knocks and the cuffs like a man. Don't become bitter, like so many others, and return to crime. The weak ones do that but never the strong. Be

"You advertised for an ex-con? Well, I'm your man."



AN ex-con has a hard time getting a job. Jimmy Gaylor found it out. So he went into his own business. Then he needed help...

strong, Jimmy, for your own sake, your mother's and mine."

"I was just wondering, Warden," said Jimmy, "if I should say frankly to possible employers that I have been in prison for five years?"

"By all means," replied Warden Crane. "And, Jimmy, I'll tell you why. Sooner or later your secret will be discovered. Unfortunately, the chief duty of some people is to mind everybody's business but their own. If you care to, you may refer employers to me."

"Thank you, Warden," said Jimmy. "You've been swell and I'll try not to disappoint you when I'm on the outside."

NOW Jimmy was again on the outside and still young, having just turned 25. And he had long planned to go back to Center City, his home town, and face the gossip and the stares of the citizens. Okay—he had it coming, but it was comforting to think that he had not murdered any one. True, he had been dumb enough to accompany Ratsy Meegan on the job when Robert Sands was killed in his small gas station.

But Jimmy's part had been a minor one. He just sat there and kept the motor running, waiting for Ratsy to come out. It would just take a second said Ratsy and no one would be hurt. Such jobs were push-overs, according to him.

However, Robert Sands was not the kind of man who could be pushed by the Ratsy Meegans of the world. He tried to knock the gun out of Ratsy's hand and Ratsy let him have it right in the center of the temple. When Sands fell to the concrete floor Ratsy raced to the cash register and found two one-dollar bills and a fifty cent piece. Then he rushed to the car and, at the gun point, ordered Jimmy Gaylor to step

on it.

Jimmy, badly frightened, had lost control of the car at the first turn, two blocks from the gas station, and crashed into a milk wagon. Both Ratsy and Jimmy were unhurt but badly stunned when Officer Hanan found them. So for the sum of \$2.50 an honest man was killed, a crack-pot gangster was executed in the death chair, and Jimmy Gaylor paid with five years of his life in the penitentiary. But within that five years Jimmy had ample time to realize that soft money is always hard.

The first person to recognize Jimmy when he reached Center City was Officer Hanan. The rotund cop had added considerable weight, probably at the expense of the fruit stands along his beat.

"Welcome home, Jimmy," greeted Hanan. "See that you keep your nose clean!"

"I will," grinned Jimmy, "even if I have to borrow your dirty handkerchief to do it."

FIVE years can do a lot to a town like Center City. For one thing, it can take on a greater population and it can remove many of the old crowd. Jimmy was glad to note so many new faces, faces that didn't know him for an ex-con. His father had died while he was in prison and his mother was now running a boarding house. Mrs. Mary Gaylor, now nearing sixty, was sure that her son was innocent of the whole thing, regardless of how people had talked. Mothers are like that. She told Jimmy when he reached home that he should just take it easy for a few weeks, rest and eat well. Mothers are also like that.

Jimmy, however, was neither a bum nor a loafer. He had worked from the age of 16, steadily, right up to the time of his arrest, and had been assistant

shipping clerk for the McAdams Packing Company. Two days after reaching Center City, Jimmy decided to go around and see his old boss, Henry Petersen, the superintendent. He wanted a job, any old job, just for a start.

"Well, well, well," greeted Petersen. "If it isn't Jimmy Gaylor! Glad to see you, Jimmy!"

"Got a job for me some place, Mr. Petersen?" asked Jimmy.

The heavy, blue-jowled face of Henry Petersen changed like a thermometer that had just been soaked in ice cubes.

"Well—er—not just now, Jimmy. Perhaps if you come around, when business picks up. You know how it is, Jimmy."

Yes; Jimmy thought he knew how it was. He had anticipated just such a run-around. Petersen had no intention of giving him a job and Jimmy knew it. So Jimmy read the want ads in the Center City *Courier* and chased around town answering them. Most of the times the jobs were filled before he had reached the place but far too often the jobs he might have gotten were lost when Jimmy offered Warden John Crane as a reference.

"Oh, I see," remarked one oily-haired pompadoured personnel clerk. "That makes it rather complicated. I'm afraid that—ah—well, you understand, I'm sure. Sorry!"

"Sure," said Jimmy. "I know how it is."

ABOUT a week later Jimmy heard that the Center City Manufacturing Company was going to turn its big plant into making defense material. He was one of the first to get in line to make out an application. When he came to the reference line, he filled out—*John Crane, Warden State Peniten-*

tiary.

He waited two weeks but was not called for an interview. He observed that others, who had applied after him, were now employed. A tinge of bitterness began to creep into his thoughts but he recalled the plea of Warden Crane and tried to forget about it.

"Look, Mom," he said one night, "I tell them the truth and what do I get?"

"Now, now, son," soothed Mom Gaylor, "don't worry. We're not hungry and you must be patient. Something will surely turn up. I know it, Jimmy; I *know* it!"

Now, in the old pre-prison days, the chief nick in Jimmy's armor was a weakness for now and then playing the horses. In his spare time he used to hang around Joe Martin's poolroom, with the bookie joint behind the rear partition, and play the ponies. It was here he had first met Ratsy Meegan and observed that Ratsy always had plenty of dough.

So one afternoon he dropped into Joe Martin's place, his first since his release, and watched the blackboard. He had no intention of betting and the five bucks he had in his pocket had been there for a long time.

Then his eye caught the name of a horse and the name startled him. It was *Black Stripes* in the fourth race, now coming up. How could he ever forget the black stripes he had worn for five years! Perhaps, maybe—well, he knew that hunches were usually the bunk, but a strong hunch overcame him.

He fingered the five-spot in his pocket tentatively and appraisingly. Then he walked over to Joe Martin and asked what sort of a horse *Black Stripes* was.

"Just a filler," said Joe. "First time I heard of him was last year, at Hialeah. Had two or three starts and I guess they had to turn a searchlight on

the track to show him the way home."

"What odds can I get on him?" asked Jimmy.

Joe Martin laughed. "Why be a sap, Jimmy? You ain't working and I guess jobs are scarce for guys like you. I don't want to take your dough, Jimmy."

"I know all about that, Joe; but I still want to know what odds I can get on *Black Stripes*."

"Well, if you insist, I don't mind laying 50-to-1 on that dog. But don't say I didn't warn you!"

"Okay," said Jimmy. "Here's five bucks."

Fifteen minutes later Jimmy Gaylor left Joe Martin's place with \$250 of Joe's money. "Hey, listen," said the amazed Joe, "did you have an inside on that sleeper?"

"Just an inside hunch," grinned Jimmy, "that's all. And just remember, Joe, that my last bet was on the house!"

As Jimmy walked toward home his spirits were as high as the clouds. One thought troubled him. How could he tell Mom? She hated racing and if he told her the truth it would hurt her. He never wanted to hurt Mom again. Nor did he want to lie about it.

"Listen, Mom," he said, "I got \$250 and I wish you wouldn't ask me *how* I got it. *Please* Mom!"

The lined face of Mom Gaylor blanched. "Oh, Jimmy, boy. Jimmy—"

"I know what you are thinking, Mom, but I swear that I got the money honestly. And listen, Mom—it will give me a chance to do something for myself!"

FOR several weeks, now, Jimmy had passed and dreamed about the possibilities of a small, vacant store on Main Street. If nobody would give him a job, then he'd *make* one! He'd show

Center City that, although he had made one dumb mistake five years ago, he wasn't any born crook or loafer.

Jimmy learned that the rent for forty dollars per month, two months in advance. "I got to get it," said the agent, "account of some other tenants not paying."

Next he had to get some credit with a soda fountain company and get other fixtures. He was glad to find that this was not difficult and also that he could get cigars and candy with small down deposit. When he was through with the rent and the dealers he had about thirty-five dollars left as working capital.

Then he got a big idea, a scheme to attract attention. His store was going to be distinctive, it was going to stand out like palm trees in Alaska! So he had the whole place painted white and, when that was completed, he had the whole store decorated with horizontal black stripes, about four inches apart. More, he had decided to name the store *The Black Stripes*.

"I guess that will give them something to talk about!" mused Jimmy when the job was done. "I'm an ex-con, trying to go straight. So what!"

Even as the startling name of the store was being painted on the front window Jimmy Gaylor went around to see Ted Barker, city editor of the *Courier*. He told Barker his whole story, how he had tried and tried to get a job and had failed. How he had decided to open a store in an effort to earn an honest living and, finally, the name of the store.

"Swell!" said City Editor Barker. "Just the sort of a story that will chase the war off the front pages for a few moments. I'll send a photographer around and take some pictures. Swell, Jimmy—and lots of luck!"

Two days later *The Black Stripes* store opened for business and the *Cour-*

ier had a fine story about Jimmy, along with three photos. Business boomed from the start and within a week Jimmy knew that he would die from lack of sleep and overwork. He needed an assistant and it was then that another novel and radical idea entered his head. He told his plan to Ted Barker.

"Go to it," advised the city editor. "Why not? It's all legal!"

The next day the *Courier* printed the following classified advertisement: *WANTED—Young man for soda and sundry store. Experience is not necessary but honesty is. Only ex-convicts need apply. Box 56, Courier.*

He received but two replies and none from Center City. If there were any ex-cons in his home-town they either kept their records a secret or did not care to be bothered with employment. The first reply came from Stanleyville, 30 miles east, and the other from Bailey's Junction, 20 miles south. The one from Stanleyville, signed Mike Petrolli, left Jimmy rather cold. It said that Petrolli had been framed three times and that he was innocent each time. It concluded, "All cops are bums. If I ever kill a guy I hope it is a cop!"

Jimmy promptly figured that the letter was a phony. He knew from his own experience in the Pen that too many guys, who were guilty, whined that they had been framed.

The second letter was from one Jack Harrison. It said, in part, "I will be only too glad to work on trial for a few days. All I want is a chance."

JIMMY wired Jack Harrison to come on at once. And when Jimmy reached the store the next morning at 7 o'clock a slim, blond lad, with blue eyes, had been waiting there for him since 5 a.m.

"I didn't know they had such early trains," said Jimmy.

"I got a ride on a truck," said Jack. "I couldn't afford to ride on a train, any way."

Jimmy took a good look at the new lad and wondered how anyone so innocent looking could ever have been a jailbird. His gray suit was neat but rather shabby and his shoes were worn thin. Jimmy opened the store and told Jack to go in.

"Now, listen," said Jimmy. "I'm not going to ask you what your rap was or anything personal, see? All I want is to give some ex-con a chance to go on the level. If I catch you doing any monkey business I'll break your neck in six places!"

"Please try me," said Jack Harrison. "Just give me a chance!"

"Okay," said Jimmy. "You might start sweeping up. The broom is in the back."

Before the week was over Jimmy discovered he had a swell assistant in Jack Harrison. The lad, who was about Jimmy's age, never had asked what his salary or hours would be. Or even when he would get a day off. He seemed happy to be at work and soon learned to mix sodas better than Jimmy.

When Jack had been with Jimmy about three weeks, Jimmy began to make plans for his future. He knew now, positively, that Jack was honest. He had put him to the test by leaving stray bills in places that only Jack could find. Not once had he touched them and Jimmy felt like a heel for testing him.

"Listen, Jack," said Jimmy, as they closed one night. "I've been thinking that you and me have been hitting it off pretty well."

"Thanks, Jimmy. You've been great to me and I like to work for you."

"Well," went on Jimmy, "you've been working harder in this joint than I have, so I'll tell you what I am going to do.

There's an empty store around on Cherry street that should make a good spot for another shop. We could call it *The Black Stripes No. 2*. I was thinking of opening that place and putting you in charge. Just to make it interesting for you, you can be a partner."

"But, Jimmy," said Jack, "I haven't been here long enough to save enough money to be a partner!"

"Who asked you for any money!" snapped Jimmy. "I figure a guy will take more interest in a joint if he is part of the business; that's why I am taking you in—free. Besides, I got my start in this store with a break and I am going to pass it along to you."

Jack Harrison remained silent. He was choking up and simply couldn't say a word. Jimmy found that tears were beginning to well up in his eyes.

"For cripe's sakes!" said Jimmy. "What's biting you?"

"Gosh, Jimmy—I—I don't know what to say! You see, Jimmy—"

"Aw, forget it, forget it!" Jimmy couldn't stand any show of emotion. "I figure that I'm giving *myself* a break by taking you into partnership. I want to show this cock-eyed town what a couple of ex-cons can really do when they get

the chance!"

"That's what I want to talk to you about, Jimmy," said Jack. "You see—well, you see—"

"Hey. What ails you?" barked Jimmy. "See—*what*?"

"Gosh, Jimmy, I don't know how to say it. I mean, I lied to you when I told you that I was an ex-convict. I never even been arrested for stealing apples when I was a kid! But honest, Jimmy—I needed a job, bad. And I couldn't get one in Bailey's Junction. And I wanted to get married, Jimmy—have one swell girl, back home—"

For a long moment Jimmy just stared at Jack Harrison. The news had knocked him rather flat. Jack began to remove his apron.

"Go ahead and fire me, Jimmy—I won't blame you. I'll still think you are a great guy, Jimmy. And I can't tell you how sorry I am that I lied to you."

Jimmy doubled his right fist and tapped Jack lightly on the chin. "Okay," he said; "forget it. You've heard the old saying that a crook can't get an honest job unless he hides his record? You just turned the saying around, that's all!"

THE LAW OF ARREST

"I'M SORRY, officer, I can't possibly appear in court tomorrow. I have a very important appointment that can't be broken. I admit I was driving recklessly, and I'm willing to pay my fine, but not tomorrow."

In the above case did you know that an officer has the right to make an arrest for a traffic violation, when the offender refuses to appear in court the next day as ordered? Of course, the offense has to have been committed in the officer's presence.

That the officer permits the offender to appear voluntarily in court the next day is a privilege accorded the offender, and not a right upon which he may insist. If, however, the offender tells the officer that he will not appear, it is the duty of the officer to put the arrest into actual effect by taking him into custody, and bringing him to the

station. The fact that it is a minor infraction makes absolutely no difference so far as this particular question is concerned.

Regarding the use of force to bring the offender to the station, the officer is authorized by law to use only such force as is necessary and proper. Of course, that depends upon the circumstances of each singular case. The officer should always be motivated only by the desire to secure, legally and in good faith, the submission of the offender to the restraint which his violation of the law makes necessary. When this restraint is obtainable by mild force, then only mild force is the limit of the power of the officer. If the offender uses force in resisting arrest, then the officer is allowed a stronger means of compulsion. Remember this the next time an officer tells you to pull over to the curb and you want to "stand on your rights."

—Willis White.

MONEY TALKS ABOUT MURDER

By RAY BLACK

**A minute mystery to test your detective ability.
Can you find the answer? There are several clues**

LOOKS like this gent was trying to leave us a clue to who knifed him," said Patrolman Kindellen.

He pointed to the two blood-smeared one-dollar bills clutched in the dead man's hand. Sam Frasier's wallet, which he apparently had withdrawn from his left hip pocket just before he died, lay beside him on the floor of his apartment.

Detective Inspector Jennings, the gleam in his cool grey eyes sharper than usual, nodded. "Indubitably," he said.

"Hunh?" Kindellen began, then, reddening, pawed in his pockets for his notes. "While you were getting out here," he announced pompously, "I dug up all the background on this case. Want me to wise you up?"

Jennings, meanwhile noting the bronze letter knife protruding from the middle-aged victim's breast, grunted assent.

"This Sam Frasier here was a gambler by trade," Kindellen said. "He liked to have some of the folks living here in the building come into his apartment occasionally for what he claimed were sociable games. Well—it seems they wasn't."

"Meaning?" asked the inspector.

"Tonight he had a poker game in here. Three gents played with him—all of 'em neighbors in the building and all of 'em heavy losers to him lately. To make a long story short, they caught him dealing from the bottom and the game broke up."

The rotund policeman paused to grin. "There were fighting words passed," he went on, "but Frasier gave 'em back what they had lost tonight and the three of 'em left without any blows being struck. Or so they all claim. So it narrows down to this—one of them three sneaked back, talked his way into the apartment and got even with Frasier with a poke of that paper knife."

Jennings shot his co-worker a sharp look.

"Has to be," Kindellen insisted. "The clerk downstairs says nobody from outside went up after 11 p.m., when the game broke up."

"Who are these suspects of yours? Jointly and severally, I presume, they deny knifing the late Mr. Frasier?"

The patrolman nodded, referring to his notes. "One was Frank Mattison, next floor up, who said he was a numismatist, whatever that is."

"A coin and currency collector," the inspector defined.

"Say! I'll bet he's . . ."

Jennings motioned to him to read on.

"Symmes Perry, next floor down, insurance man."

The inspector made no comment.

"The third guy was Bill Joiner, same floor as this, a stationery salesman for a paper company." Kindellen rubbed his bald spot, ruminating. "Hey!" he broke out. "How about this last one? His first name's Bill, see, and he sells paper."

Inspector Jennings thumbed the honor society medal on his cross-vest watch chain. "Where do these suspects work?" he wanted to know.

Puzzled, Kindellen read: "The coin and money collector has an office in the Flatiron Building. The insurance hloke works for the Guarantee Mutual and the stationery shop out of which the salesman operates is at 210 Main."

Jennings' eyes twinkled. "I'll keep a lookout here while you go get our killer."

Kindellen spluttered, "But who—which—?"

"Plain as the pug nose on that moon face of yours," the inspector chuckled. "Go on now—you've got your orders."

(Solution on page 305)



"Which way to do Thoid National Bank?"

The CASE OF THE



by WALLY WOOD

MORE than three decades have passed since the case of the unclaimed corpse shocked and mystified the eastern Nebraska farm country. For thirty years howling winds and bitter blizzards have roared over his lonely prairie grave. Yet, the case is no nearer solution today than it was on that June day in 1911 when the bullet riddled corpse was committed to the grave. . . .

GEORGE RAVOLDI worked methodically in his small harness shop in eastern Nebraska on a bright spring morning in 1906. From where he sat

he could look out the open window across the green fields of his farm. In the nearby house he could hear his wife, Marie, as she went about her household duties. For a moment a surge of unhappiness welled up within him. He could remember the time when Marie, whom he still thought of as the flashing-eyed beauty he had married, went gaily about her work, always with a song on her lips. But that had been longer ago than he liked to think about. That had been before their only son, Val, had left home, smitten with a restlessness which could not be stilled by the prosaic life on a farm. Five years had come and

UNCLAIMED CORPSE



Here is the fantastic true story of a corpse that had no destination at the end of a long train ride. Its identity remains a mystery.

gone since he left and there had been no word from him.

In the kitchen of the farmhouse Mrs. Ravoldi finished washing the dishes. Before starting to churn she walked through the house into the living room and knelt before a small altar and prayed fervently for a few minutes. This was a ritual which she had followed every day for five years. In her eyes was an indefinable sadness and in her bearing was defeat. As she finished

praying she might have been heard to say, "If I could only know where he is. Even if he were dead I could stand the knowledge better than this awful uncertainty."

As if in answer to her prayer, the old-fashioned telephone hanging on the wall started ringing. Three long rings and four short rings. That was the Ravoldi signal, and as is customary in the vastness of the great plains country, all up and down the party line neigh-

bors hastened to lift their receivers to find out who was calling the Ravoldi family.

It was the station agent in the nearby village of Weeping Water and he was almost incoherent with excitement. Not often was the monotony of his job broken by such news as he had.

"Morning, Mrs. Ravoldi; morning. I called ye to tell ye that a telegram just come in for you. Better prepare for bad news."

Disregarding the low, heartbroken moan that came from the receiver, he went on, "Nope, I don't want to be the one to tell you what it is. Old Doc Kell was a going out your way to see the Jones boy and he's a bringing it." And with that remark he hung up.

Even before the old country doctor arrived with the telegram, friends and neighbors were converging on the Ravoldi home. They were coming to offer whatever help and sympathy that the bad news in the telegram might merit. That is the way of the western farm country. If their listening in on telephone conversations could be construed as prying, then the honest simplicity and sincerity of their desire to help, more than made up for it.

BY THE time that the ancient grey mare that the doctor drove turned into the lane, a dozen neighboring farmers and their wives were congregated on the Ravoldi's front porch.

The old medico patted Mrs. Ravoldi on the shoulder and said, "You must be brave Mrs. Ravoldi; it is about Val."

As she tore open the yellow envelope and read the message, the mother slumped to the floor. Her husband picked her up, stuffed the message in his pocket and carried his wife to her bedroom where she was revived by Doctor Kell. Ravoldi then returned to the front porch and read the telegram aloud

to his neighbors, "*The body of your son will arrive on the six-forty train.*" The message had been sent from Bainbridge, Georgia, and signed "Hoffslau".

With stoical fortitude the Ravoldis started making preparations for the burial of their son. The wandering son whom both of them had hoped would marry, settle down and take over the farm. Burial space was secured in the little rural cemetery just outside of Weeping Water and arrangements were made to have the body brought to the farm home for the funeral.

That night a depressed and saddened group of friends and neighbors sat with the bereaved family. The casket had arrived on the evening train and was sitting in the parlor surrounded by flickering kerosene lamps and banked with wild flowers. When her husband had started to open the casket the heart-broken mother had said, "No George! No! I couldn't stand to see him. Always I want to remember him as he was when he left." Understanding how she felt, her husband did not insist.

It was growing late and those neighbors who were not going to spend the night sitting up with the family were beginning to leave, when far down the road could be heard the rhythmical hoof-beats of fast-moving horses and the flickering, bobbing lights of a carriage came into view.

In a few minutes the vehicle turned into the lane and the panting horses plunged to a stop. A smartly dressed man and woman got out of the carriage and as they mounted the steps of the farmhouse and stood near the carbide storm light on the porch, an incredulous gasp of astonishment went up from the persons on the veranda.

"Ma! Oh my God! Ma! Come here Ma!" screamed George Ravoldi as he stared in bewildered amazement at the couple. "It's Val, Ma! It's Val!

He ain't dead, Ma! Here he is!" he continued.

At first the grief-stricken woman, thinking that the loss of their son had caused her husband to break down completely, would not come out of the house. When at last she did step out on the porch she stared as if in a trance and then walked slowly towards the man, grasped his arms, stared long and intently into his face. A long sigh escaped her and she burst into tears as she sobbed, "*Madre de Dios!* It is he! It is he!" and for the second time that day she fainted.

When Val Ravoldi was told that he was dead and that his body was lying in the parlor in a casket, it was his turn to be dumfounded. He explained to his parents that he had been living in Spencer, Iowa, for more than three years; that after he left home he had gone to school and studied agricultural chemistry and that he had a fine job on the big experimental farm of a Mr. Keepers near Spencer. The woman with him was his wife and he had waited until his success was assured before returning home as he wanted to surprise his parents and make them proud of him.

He was further mystified when he read the telegram. Not only had he not died in Bainbridge, Georgia; he had never even heard of the place.

AFTER a hasty consultation with the neighbors a call was put in for the sheriff of Cass County and when he arrived the whole fantastic story was told to him. He decided that the first thing to do was open the casket and see if some hoax had been perpetrated on the parents. Most of the crowd seemed to think that they would find that some ghastly practical joker had shipped an empty casket, or at least one filled with ballast, to the family.

As the law enforcement officer unscrewed the lid of the coffin the farmers and townspeople crowded about him. By this time, many of them, convinced that the whole thing was a gruesome joke, were laughing and making wise-cracks in their relief. But as the last screw was removed and the lid lifted off, those nearest the sheriff screamed in terror, *for in the casket lay the body of a man who had been shot through the head, and who was, in every way, the exact double of Val Ravoldi!*

That young man spent many unpleasant weeks during which many of the residents looked upon him with suspicion. They seemed to believe that he was an interloper, if not a downright criminal and that it was the real Val Ravoldi who lay in the casket which had been removed to the county morgue. However, his thorough familiarity with the neighborhood and surrounding country, coupled with his memory of things that had happened years before, soon convinced the most skeptical that he was indeed the real Val.

In those days there was no Federal Bureau of Investigation nor other Government agencies to assist in the solving of mysterious crimes that had interstate ramifications. Therefore, the ensuing investigation was a long and tedious one. The sheriff of Decatur County, Georgia, of which Bainbridge is the county seat, was contacted and his assistance requested. Then, by process of elimination, an effort was made to determine if the Ravoldis had any enemies who might perpetrate such a horrible hoax. But not a single clue could be found. The Ravoldi family had lived in Cass County for twenty-five years and they were liked and respected by everyone for their thriftiness and their willingness to always help anyone in distress in the years of drought or

poor crops. No member of the family had ever been in any part of Georgia nor had they ever known anyone from Bainbridge.

The sheriff of Decatur county reported back that no one had ever heard of a Val Ravoldi and that there had been no murders or other crimes of violence in southwest Georgia for more than three years. The officer had interviewed the station agent and learned that on April 27th, just before the departure of the morning train of the Atlantic Coast Line, a dust covered express wagon had pulled up to the station and a casket was unloaded onto the freight platform. The taciturn driver had told the agent that it was the body of a man who had died in Clarksville, Florida, just across the state line in Calhoun county, and that his people were shipping the body to Nebraska for burial. He paid cash for the charges and discouraged efforts of the agent to learn more about the deceased.

Clarksville, Florida, is in the remote gulf-coast swamp country and residents of that region are not verbose. They are exceedingly clannish and resent outsiders prying into their affairs. It is a country of isolation, suspicion and blood feuds.

For many years it has been necessary to produce a death certificate before a body can be shipped for burial. But that was not true in the rural areas of America in those days shortly after the turn of the century, so the fact was never established that a valid death certificate had been issued for the unclaimed corpse. Nor could the undertaker who prepared the body be found. Expert embalmers came down from Omaha to examine the body and expressed the opinion that the work had been done by an expert craftsman.

The Omaha police department loaned a couple of their ace detectives to the

Cass county sheriff and their first move was an attempt to trace the coffin. That proved to be a comparatively easy job. It had been manufactured by the Bristol Coffin and Casket Company of Bristol, Virginia. Unfortunately it was a popular model that sold in the tens of thousands in every section of the country and did not bear an identifying serial number as do all expensive coffins of the present day. Books of the casket company showed several hundred customers in every state in the union. An intensive effort was made by the Omaha sleuths to trace each sale made by the retailers but had to give it up as a bad job. Cass County tax payers were beginning to complain about the expense of the investigation.

DURING these weeks the cadaver of the murdered and mysterious stranger lay in the county morgue. Word of the strange case had spread over the mid-west and thousands of the morbidly curious made the pilgrimage to Weeping Water to see the corpse. Among these thousands were many famous detectives and private operators who had been retained by the families of missing men. None of them could furnish a clue to the dead man's identity.

Early in the investigation the county commissioners had voted a special fund to be used for advertising purposes and tens of thousands of circulars and handbills were circulated throughout the country. One of those handbills was a classic. The county fathers, being both opportunists and thrifty, combined their police work with a high-pressure publicity campaign extolling the opportunities and advantages to be found in Cass County. In the same breath this weird handbill asked for identification of the unclaimed corpse and invited persons looking for a new home in a progressive

community to come to Weeping Water!

Several weeks passed before the circulars brought results. And when they did come they were almost as bizarre as the actual mystery. A beautifully gowned woman in a chauffeur-driven steam car drove up to the morgue and *positively identified the corpse as her long-lost son*. She insisted on making immediate arrangements for shipping the body to New York for burial.

That was before she happened to pass Val Ravoldi on the street. When she saw him she went into hysterics. After a sedative had been administered she moaned, "My boy! My boy! He isn't dead! I saw him! Bring my son to me! I want my son! Who is playing this terrible joke on me?"

The distraught mother insisted on being taken to the Ravoldi home and even after it was conclusively proven to her that Val could not be her son she refused to accept the proof and reviled and upbraided the befuddled young man for disowning his own mother. A few days later she left for New York.

LUCILLE LA SOTA, beautiful young girl from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, was the next person to show up in the small prairie town to claim the body of the deceased. Miss La Sota told a sad, though intriguingly strange story.

She said that she had met the young man, whom she identified as William Whitner, two years earlier when she was spending the winter in Clearwater, Florida, a small town on the central west coast. He was engaged in the sponge fishing industry in Tarpon Springs and had accumulated a modest fortune. According to Lucille, it had been a case of love at first sight and when he begged her to marry him she agreed but insisted that they must wait a year. After she returned to Wilkes-

Barre she heard from him at weekly intervals for several months and then the letters stopped. When three months had passed without word from her fiance she became frantic. *In his last letter Whitner had told her that he was going to Clarksville on business!* Miss La Sota immediately left Wilkes-Barre for Tarpon Springs and when she was unable to find any trace of the young sponge merchant in that port she had gone on to Clarksville. But she was unable to find anyone who had ever heard of her sweetheart.

Heartbroken, she had returned to her home and remained there until a friend sent her one of the circulars that the county commissioners had distributed.

After hearing the girl's story the authorities decided to send a special agent to the small Florida community to see if he could establish the identity of the unclaimed corpse and further investigate the William Whitner angle. Miss La Sota agreed to remain in Weeping Water until the investigation had been completed.

Of course the inevitable happened. She met Val Ravoldi and his wife at an ice cream social. For a moment she stared at him in amazement and then rushed into his arms, much to the chagrin of that much bedeviled young man.

"Bill! Oh, Bill darling!" said the young lady. "Where have you been? Don't you still love me, Bill? I love you so much and I thought I had lost you!"

When the flabbergasted Val tried to explain the situation to her and prove his identity Lucille turned on him with all the fury of a woman scorned. She called him a despoiler of womanhood, a seducer of innocent young girls, a crook, a murderer and about everything else in the book.

The angry and mystified girl left town on the next train and in the rec-

ords she is ignored from that point on, apparently dropping completely out of the case.

WHEN the investigator who had been sent to Florida returned to Weeping Water he reported that not only had the good people of Clarksville never heard of either Val Ravoldi or William Whitner, but that none of them could recall a murder in the county in thirty years. *Nor was there an undertaker in Clarksville!* The name Hoffslau, which had been signed to the telegram received by the Ravoldis, meant nothing to the cracker residents. Some of them ventured the opinion that it sounded like some "furriner."

The special agent had gone on to Tarpon Springs and had at last managed to pick up the trail of William Whitner. It would appear that Mr. Whitner grew tired of the amorous Lucille and had quietly liquidated his business and moved to the lower east coast. He had finally been located living near Miami, very much alive and very much married.

As the months passed many other people came from all sections of the country to identify the homeless and much disturbed cadaver. Many of them were vehement and positive in their identifications, but each time some flaw developed. Usually that flaw first became apparent when the strangers met Val Ravoldi. The corpse was in turn identified as a lumber jack from Oregon, a song and dance man from New Orleans, a private detective from Saint Louis and a theological student named Charles Dungan from Marion, Virginia.

From Chicago came an enterprising showman who offered the Ravoldis ten thousand dollars for concession rights to turn their home into macabre theater and charge admission. He also offered the county commissioners an additional ten thousand dollars if they would permit him to display the body in the Ravoldi home and later on take it on a tour of the mid-west. Both offers were turned down.

Newspapers all over America and even in England featured the story and Val Ravoldi became a celebrated personality. The yellow journals, just coming into their heyday, sent feature writers and sob-sisters to Weeping Water for interviews and first-person stories. The Ravoldi family was finally forced to sell their farm and leave the community in order to avoid the unwelcome publicity which threatened their domestic happiness.

For five long years the body of the unfortunate Mr. Ravoldi's double lay in the county morgue. Then, when all chance of identification being established seemed to have passed, the unclaimed corpse was buried in the potter's field of the impoverished dead. . .

THIRTY years have passed since that startling and mysterious telegram, with its resultant drama, disturbed the lethargic inertia of the small village of Weeping Water. The case is no nearer to solution now than it was on that long ago day. Not even a pine board marks the final resting place of the deceased intruder. Truth is stranger than fiction and perhaps it is possible that some reader of this magazine can help clear up this enigma.

GET THE ZIFF-DAVIS READING HABIT

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WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT CRIME?

"Ignorance of the law excuses no man; not that all men know the law, but because 'tis an excuse every man will plead, and no man can tell how to refute him."— John Selden.

SUPPOSE that you are driving too fast down a dark street. Too late, you see a car stalled in the roadway. You slap on the brakes, bust smash into the car. There's nobody in the car, and no witness on the street. You call the cops. You tell them that you were traveling only twenty miles an hour when you hit this car sitting out in the middle of the street without lights. Will you get away with your lie?

No. Traffic police, by studying your skid marks and using an instrument called the decelerometer, can determine how fast you were traveling when you hit that car.

* * *

DOES a wire-tapper need a pair of pliers? Not necessarily. For some time now there has been in use a device that picks messages out of the telephone wire by "induction." All you have to do is park the device alongside the 'phone wire. No cutting, no splicing, no telltale click. Very clever. But rumor says that the underworld has actually worked out a device more clever still; it also works without splicing in wires, by induction, and is so sensitive that it tells if an induction wire-tapper is listening in on the telephone wire!

* * *

WHY are crowded New York subways amazingly free of pickpockets?

Because pickpockets avoid the subway during rush hours, on account of the fact that any known pickpockets seen in the subway at such times are grabbed by the police and sent up for six months. Just for being there.

* * *

WHICH is more helpful in catching a criminal—a full view photo of his face, or a profile picture?

You can debate it, but here is the guiding principle: Next to fingerprints, the ears are the most peculiarly personal part of the body. To put it another way: Next to the patterns of the friction ridges of the skin, the shape of the ears is the most telltale feature of an individual. In the arrest of a person on identification by photograph, the profile view showing the ears is the little item that socks him in the cooler . . . A woman who claimed to be the Grand Duchess Anastasia of Russia was shown to be an impostor, despite a strong resemblance, when photos

showed that her ears did not shape up correctly.

* * *

SUPPOSE that you're a crook and you're choosing an accomplice for a crime. Why is a chap who's got a couple thousand dollars socked away in a Postal Savings Account more dangerous to you as an accomplice than an eager young crook who's never saved a dollar?

Because the man with the Postal Savings account has his fingerprints on file—already. They're taken when you start the Postal Savings account.

* * *

IF YOU have a pet pooch and take him along when you commit a crime, why do you run a risk of detection no matter how doggone careful you are?

Your dog noses around. Your dog presses his wet muzzle against something and leaves an imprint. Your dog's nose has a network of wrinkles which is as individual to him as your fingerprints are to you. Your dog is identified by that imprint. Your dog leads the cops to you. You're socked into jail. Doggonit.

* * *

AFINE dress shop burns. Silks, satins, furs and suedes are ruined, and the owner asks the insurance company for fifty grand. Business was bad, and the insurance company lays its finger alongside its nose and says "Arson!" The insurance company sends a fire expert to look for proof that the fire was no act of God but an act of man. The detective looks through the wreckage. He notices an ordinary pin sticking flat to the side of an iron radiator in no ordinary fashion. He removes the pin, holds it close to the radiator—and the pin jumps to the radiator and sticks there in spite of man, law, or gravity. The detective says *So that's it*, and wires his company to pay the shop owner every cent of that fifty grand insurance. Why?

The radiator was magnetized. Lightning, striking a building, may make iron objects magnetic. A compass is handy for detecting this item of evidence. Other signs that lightning struck the place: shattered pieces of plaster, bricks scattered about and glazed on the surface. It is also useful to find out if a lightning storm occurred before the fire. Lightning does not strike even once out of a blue sky.

THREE FOR TEA

By LEONARD B. ROSBOROUGH

Eliza Farr had a neat way to make John Caine confess. So he did, and used her own stunt to once more turn the tables!

JOHAN CAINE, you're a thief!" Miss Eliza Farr's voice was harsh with repressed passion. She stood tight-lipped, white-haired, an inch over five feet, a trim little sixty-year-old in plain gray suit and skimpy white apron—and glared across her desk at the man in her swivel chair.

John Caine, Miss Farr's attorney and investment counsellor, set down his cup so suddenly the tea slopped over. "My dear Miss Eliza!" he protested in his best senatorial tone. He was near his client's age, spare of build, with shrewd, unemotional eyes in a solemn face.

Miss Farr smiled grimly. "*You're* the dear one. You've cost *me* dear—twenty thousand dollars you've stolen—money I've been years accumulating. I want your check—and a written confession. That's why I had you come here."

"Here" was Miss Farr's study—a room built into the corner of her suburban bungalow basement, with a single small curtained window hinged high up near the ceiling. Here she wrote whimsical articles and stories for the juvenile magazines, undisturbed by peddlers, postmen and other callers. Besides the desk and chairs, the room contained a small modern safe, a cabinet and an electric plate. On the last she brewed

tea for herself and her occasional guests.

John Caine stared back at her with unbelieving eyes. The sound of the postman's steps came faintly to them through the silence. Caine started a little as three or four letters slid from the wall chute and fell onto the desk before him.

The slight interruption brought him out of his trance. He came to his feet. A breeze from the window above his head ruffled his graying hair.

"You're going too far!" he said hoarsely, his face white with rage. "This is blackmail." He started around the desk. "I'll—"

He came to an abrupt stop. Miss Farr's hand slid from under the skimpy apron, holding a .32 caliber revolver. It looked tremendous in her small hand, and the hand was steady.

"Sit down, John Caine. I was afraid you might kick over the traces, so I fixed for it."

Caine stared at her and took a step backward. His hands, groping behind him, found the arms of the swivel chair. He let himself down very carefully, brought out a handkerchief and mopped his face.

"You're—you're mad," he stammered.



The old lady stuck the end of the lethal hose into the window

"I'm good and mad," she agreed.

"You'll be disgraced."

"And so will you."

"Your nephew," Caine argued, "he'll be disgraced. You're proud of David—just promoted to first class patrolman. If you turn criminal, it'll ruin his career."

She pondered this well before answering. "I guess Davie can take care of himself; he's a smart boy."

She walked backward, holding the gun trained on him, until she reached the doorway. There she stopped and asked, "Do I get the check and confession?"

Encouraged by her retreat, Caine sprang up again. "No, by Heaven! You're bluffing. You won't shoot. I'll send you to prison—"

His words were cut off as Miss Farr sprang back through the portal, slammed the door and bolted it from the outside.

SHE snatched up a length of hose, ran up the steps and out to his car standing in the drive near the study window. She started the engine, fitted the hose over the end of the exhaust pipe, and carried the other end to the window leading to the basement apartment.

Caine looked up. Before he could speak, she thrust in the hose. The hot, pungent fumes hit him in the face.* He fell back and stormed at her:

"This is murder. You can't get away with it. You'll be sent to the chair!"

"No, John Caine," she told him firmly. "When you pass out, I'll simply load you into your car, drive into your garage and leave you there with the motor running. Your family's away; you may not be discovered for days.

* Carbon monoxide gas is heavier than air, and flowing into the basement room from this outside window, it would settle to the floor and gradually fill the room until any occupant died of asphyxiation from the poisonous fumes.—Ed.

It'll be a plain case of suicide. That's one nice thing about us both living 'way out here in the sticks."

Caine lunged forward, pushed the end of the hose outside, slammed the window and locked it.

Miss Farr picked up a small stone, looked at the window and hesitated. Her thrifty soul rebelled against even this small act of vandalism. But what was a pane of glass against twenty thousand dollars? She compressed her lips, gave one of the small panes a sharp blow. A section of the pane broke away.

Again she stabbed the hose through the opening and held it firmly against Caine's frenzied efforts to push it out.

He backed away, coughing, and choked out, "Shut it off. The fumes are suffocating."

"Will you sign?"

The gentle puffing of the exhaust through the hose was the only sound for several seconds. At last Caine answered, "I'd better be dead than in prison."

"You don't have to go to prison," she replied. "I'll cash the check and keep the confession secret as long as you behave."

Another wait. Then Caine said, "Agreed. Shut it off."

MISS FARR switched off the car motor and came back to the window. Caine had it open and was gulping the fresh air that poured in.

"Now," she said, "I'll dictate, and you write. Ready?"

"*I, John Caine, confess that I stole twenty thousand dollars from the estate in my care belonging to Eliza Farr. My check for the amount is given in restitution for this theft.*"

"Now sign that and write the check."

"But I haven't twenty thousand in my account," Caine protested.

"You can get it. How soon?"

"This is Monday. I can have that much deposited by Friday."

"All right, I'll hold it till then. Pass the check and confession out to me."

She stuffed the papers into her waist and went down to the basement study. She rapped on the door and called out, "If you're not sitting in the swivel chair when I open the door, I'll shoot, as sure as you're a foot high!"

Caine was in the appointed place when she opened the door with the revolver in her hand. She smiled at him and said gently, "Now, Mr. Caine, won't you finish your tea?"

John Caine banged the desk with his fist. "You'll go to prison for this."

"Tut, tut. Surely you won't tell anyone that a frail little woman got the best of you. You wouldn't want that confession made public; a little investigation would confirm it. Now, don't move from that chair till I give the word."

Still holding the gun ready, she began to manipulate the dial of the safe, her eyes shifting from it to her prisoner and back again. Once he started to rise. She said, "Don't," and Caine sat down.

The safe door opened. She tossed the confession onto the desk. "Put it in an envelope and seal it."

As the sullen man complied, she folded the check and put it into the pocket in her handbag. Caine tossed the sealed confession to her. She put it into the safe and spun the dial.

"As long as that's out of your reach," she said, "I don't think you'll start anything. And you couldn't open the safe in a month of Sundays. Now you may go."

She stepped out of the study and beckoned with the pistol. He walked past her, toward the stairs.

"I'm glad you frighten easily," she

confessed in a relieved tone. "I really wouldn't have had the heart to let you suffocate."

Caine stopped and eyed her speculatively. "I thought so. I've known you for years, and I can't understand how you went even this far—"

"But I *will* shoot if you start anything now," she added. Her hand tightened on the gun. "You look as if you could murder me."

Caine's voice was hoarse with restrained anger: "I could—with great pleasure."

He mounted the steps and left the house. She heard his car door slam and the roar of the engine as it backed out of her drive.

Miss Eliza Farr smiled gently; then she sobered. "I really believe he meant it," she murmured. A faint shadow of anxiety came into her mild blue eyes.

She fitted a square of cardboard over the broken pane, until such time as the repairman could get around to replacing it.

THE next Thursday afternoon, following her usual custom, Miss Eliza Farr drove into town. She returned at dusk, put her car away, and went at once to her underground study to look over the mail.

She opened the study door and reached for the light switch. There'd probably be a check for that article ordered by *Cheerful Childhood*—

The switch clicked—and Miss Farr caught her breath. John Caine was sitting in her swivel chair with cups and saucers and her bright red teapot on the desk before him.

"Come in, Miss Eliza," he said with mock courtesy. "I dropped in to finish the cup of tea I started on my last visit."

Miss Farr's lips tightened. "Broke in, you mean."

"Does it matter? I'm in." Caine got up, gestured toward the swivel chair, said, "Allow me."

Miss Farr watched him warily as she went around the desk and sat down. On the desk was a pile of letters which had come in her absence. She dropped her keys beside them, and spoke to Caine:

"I don't know why you've sneaked in like this. Trying to beg off on the check?"

Before replying, Caine lifted the teapot and filled the cups; he pulled up a chair and sat down opposite her. "I thought you'd need a bracer. I have bad news." Caine raised his cup and drank.

Miss Farr followed his example, lowering her eyes to conceal the troubled look in them.

"What news?" she asked.

"You won't be able to cash the check tomorrow."

"Then the bad news is more yours than mine," she answered quietly. "The confession—"

John Caine raised his hand. "Have you looked at the confession—or the check—since last Monday evening?"

"No."

"Then do," Caine urged her, drily.

"Open the safe? So you can—"

Caine gestured again. "If the check is still in your purse, look at it."

Miss Farr eyed him uncertainly. At last she said, "So long as you can't get the confession, I guess it wouldn't profit you to grab the check."

She opened her purse, took out the check and unfolded it. A look of dismay flitted across her face.

Caine got up, leaned forward and placed his hands on the desk. "You see, my dear lady," he said coldly, "you have the printed form, but the writing has vanished. The confession sheet is as blank as that check."

"I don't—" Miss Farr began.

"You don't understand. Of course. I'll explain. When you phoned me the other evening, I suspected you had uncovered something, so I came prepared. My pen was loaded with a special ink—a little tincture of iodine, a little starch. It writes nicely, but fades in a day or two. . . . And now I'll be leaving."

He snatched her keys from the desk, sprang back through the study door and locked it.

OUTSIDE, he went to the garage and backed her car into the driveway.

His own car was not there. He had come on foot over a path through the fields and woods from his home three hundred yards away. Miss Farr didn't have many callers, but if one should come unexpectedly, he'd have to finish the job by violent means and get away unseen and quietly without the handicap of a car. One of those long chances that must be guarded against.

He smiled grimly as he fitted a length of hose onto the exhaust pipe. "Sauce for the goose," he muttered.

The light inside snapped off as he approached the window. The broken pane had not been repaired. Caine poked the wedged-in square of cardboard free, thrust the hose through the opening and past the edge of the curtain.

He crouched before the window and called softly, "Can you hear me, Miss Eliza? How do you like the game you invented, now that it's turned against you?"

There was no reply. He waited half a minute and called again, "Goodnight, Miss Eliza."

Then she spoke, faintly, "You're bluffing, John Caine. I'll not give you the check and confession."

Caine laughed. "I'm not bluffing. They're of no use to me now. A blank check is just a blank check. A plain sheet of paper tells nothing—but you

would. With you out of the way, I can cover up everything."

He felt a sudden tug on the hose. It was jerked from his hand and pulled halfway through the window before he caught it. He pulled it back, refitted it to the exhaust pipe, and again thrust the end through the window. She fought to push it outside, as he had done when he was in the trap.

Caine chuckled. "Isn't it odd, Miss Eliza, how exactly history repeats itself—up to a certain point? This time, though, there'll be no turning back."

Miss Farr did not answer. He heard the faint sound of the phone receiver being taken from its cradle; after a few seconds he heard it replaced.

"No use," he called to her. "It's disconnected."

THERE was a strong breeze blowing directly against the window. Caine got a robe from the car and stuffed it into the broken pane, around the hose, to keep the clean air out.

He crouched there for five minutes, listening to the gentle throb of the exhaust as it poured its fumes into the closed room. Everything was quiet inside.

Caine went to where he had disconnected the joint in the phone line, twisted the wires together again, and rewound the insulating tape over the bare connection.

A little later, when he could feel sure the woman was beyond help, he'd have to unfasten the study door. Obviously, a suicide should never be found in a room locked on the outside. He might as well recover the blank check, too. There was little risk that it would ever be used against him; on the other hand, nothing would be accomplished by leaving it behind.

The confession? There was nothing he could do about it, but the writing

would almost certainly have faded away, as it had done on the check.

He went down, turned on a basement light and opened the study door. The room was filled with a pale blue haze; acrid fumes bit at his nostrils. He hesitated; there'd be a strong concentration of carbon monoxide in there; if he got a few good whiffs, he'd be knocked out, and the C O would finish him.

He closed his lips, held his nose and strode in. Miss Farr was draped over the desk, her head pillowed on the undisturbed stack of mail, the face half turned to him. Her partly closed eyes gleamed in the dim light coming through the doorway. A carbon monoxide victim's eyes, he remembered, were bright after death. The left hand lay on the desk before her face, the other behind her head, covered by the fluffy mass of her white bobbed hair.

He didn't see the check; probably under her head with that stack of mail, he thought. He started forward—but his lungs were crying for air. He ran out into the open basement, released his nose and breathed heavily.

Then he heard the crunch of wheels on the gravel drive—

He'd have to get out. Let the check go! It didn't really matter anyway.

HE GOT out through the basement rear door, locked it from the outside, and put the key under the door mat. He crept away through the dense shrubbery. In the dark a thorn raked his finger. Caine cursed softly. The scratch was a light one; he could feel only a light ooze of blood. He wiped it off and presently the flow stopped entirely.

He went on until he reached the path by which he had come. There, instead of continuing on to his own home, he turned and walked rapidly back toward the Farr bungalow, with no effort at

concealment. There was an automatic in his vest pocket—a very small one, but good enough for emergency use at close range.

He could see the new arrival, a huge dark blur, working at the entrance door. As Caine's feet hit the gravel drive, the man whirled and shot the beam of a flashlight at him. He held a service revolver in the other hand.

Caine raised his hands, called out, "Who is it?"

The man put his gun away. "Oh it's you, Mr. Caine. It's me, Dave Farr," he rushed on excitedly. "Aunt Eliza's inside. There was a hose from that car exhaust stuck in the window I pulled it out. We've got to break in—quick. I'm afraid she's—"

"Good Heavens!" Caine exclaimed. "I'll try the back."

Dave Farr beat him to the rear. He was a young giant of a man, but his efforts to force the kitchen door failed.

"Try the basement," Caine advised.

As they ran down the outer steps, Caine managed to kick the door mat aside. There was a tinkle of metal on concrete.

"Here's the key," Dave cried. He snatched it up and they went in.

Young Dave swung open the door of the study, reached in and pushed a light switch. Caine caught his arm. "Wait," he cautioned Dave. "A whiff or two of that would knock you out."

DAVE FARR pulled away, ran across the study and opened the high window. The wind poured in.

Dave bent over the limp gray figure, his face knotted with worry. He clasped one of her wrists, placed his ear to her back. Finally he straightened and looked silently at Caine.

Caine ventured into the room. "Is she—gone?"

Dave flapped his hands. "If I'd

only come earlier! I knew she had something on her mind when I saw her today."

Caine's eyes flickered. "You saw her?"

"Yes. She came in to congratulate me. You know, I was just promoted—patrolman, first class."

Caine nodded. "I know. She told me—"

"She gave me the combination to her safe," Dave went on. "Tried to appear happy—said she wanted me to have it just in case—but I knew something was bothering her."

Caine sat down suddenly. This had an ominous sound. And he was just awaking to the fact that the two tea cups on the desk needed explaining.

"This is ghastly, David," he said in a choked voice. "I had tea with her earlier this evening. I noticed it, too—she was worried. When I got home, I phoned and got no answer, so I came back. Well"—he shrugged—"since we can do nothing to help her, better leave the body, until the coroner arrives."

"Yeah, don't touch anything." Young Dave cleared his throat. "She was like a mother to me, Mr. Caine. I still can't believe she's dead. Why would she do away with herself?"

Caine got up and squeezed his arm. "I can't understand it, either, but brace up, old fellow. You couldn't foresee this. If anything, I'm more at fault than you. I've handled her affairs for years, and I never suspected she'd do this."

Dave Farr looked puzzled. "Funny thing, there's no broken glass from that window."

"It was broken before," Caine explained. "I noticed it this evening. She had it stopped with a piece of cardboard."

"But there's a smear of blood on the

glass that's still in the frame," Dave argued.

Caine felt a little wave of cold run over him. It wasn't his blood, he knew, but there was a fresh cut on his own finger—the one he'd raked on the thorn in the dark. If this young cub noticed that, he might become suspicious, dumb as he was. And one thing could lead to another. He closed his fist so that the injured forefinger was hidden under the thumb.

He relaxed as Dave continued, "Probably scratched her hand when she put the hose through the window—or when she stuffed that robe around it."

Caine said, "Very likely." It seemed probable that she had injured her hand when she tried to push the hose out of the window. But he couldn't be sure. He felt relieved when Dave made no move to check his theory. If he did that, and found no injury to her hand—

"There's another funny thing," Dave said; "she didn't touch that last batch of mail."

Caine silently cursed himself. He should have slit those envelopes. Aloud he said, "In her state of mind, whatever caused it, she could easily overlook a thing like that."

Dave nodded numbly. "I suppose so." He brought a notebook from his pocket, consulted it and began to manipulate the dial of the safe. When the door opened, he pawed over the safe's contents, finally picked out a sealed envelope.

It looked to Caine like the one in which she had placed his confession. He felt his scalp tighten. For one panicky moment, he wondered whether his fading ink had run true to form. He stood up, still keeping his fists closed to conceal the cut on his forefinger. Dave slit the envelope and pulled out the sheet.

Caine breathed again as he saw that it was blank on both sides.

Dave wrinkled his forehead and looked again at the envelope. "Why'd she seal up an envelope with nothing but blank paper inside?" Dave wondered aloud.

Caine said, "She probably intended leaving some message and overlooked it, like she did the letters. She must have been utterly distracted." He mopped his face again. "I don't know when I've had such a shock," he said—truthfully.

"I could use a drink," Dave muttered. "She wouldn't have anything. Maybe a shot of tea would be better than nothing."

HE LIFTED the lid of the red teapot sitting on the desk. Caine fancied he saw the big youngster's body stiffen for an instant, but Dave replaced the lid and said, "It's two-thirds full. Get a pan and we'll heat it up."

Caine said, "I could use a cup, myself," opened the cabinet and picked out the first thing he saw—a bright stainless steel frying pan.

When he turned, Dave Farr was gently lifting the fluff of white hair which concealed Miss Farr's right hand. He bent over and examined the hand. Caine held his breath. Would he find a cut that would explain the blood smear on the jagged window glass?

Finally the young policeman let the hair drop back into place. "Just wanted to be sure," he said absently.

"Sure of what?"

"Whether she cut her finger on that glass," Dave replied.

Caine breathed again. "Good deduction, David. Your aunt, poor soul, had reason to be proud of you."

Dave turned back to the desk and again lifted the lid of the teapot. He reached in and pulled out a strip of

paper. Caine's fear came back with a rush. It was the check, half its length soaked, the rest dry. The dry end was still blank, but the other showed clear brown script. Caine stood rigid, trying to build up a desperate hope. His signature was still invisible, undeveloped, on the dry end of the check.

After a careless glance, Dave dropped the check onto the desk and reached a long arm toward Caine for the pan.

Caine was holding the handle in his right hand. He'd forgotten that scarred finger for the moment. But the cut wasn't conspicuous; Dave hadn't given any indication that he had noticed it. Casually Caine slid the finger under the handle of the pan and handed the utensil to Dave. Casually he slid his fingers into his coat front, out of sight. The tips touched the small automatic in his vest pocket.

For the first time since his arrival, Dave's lips smiled, but his eyes did not. They were fixed on Caine's hand, half hidden under his coat. "Trying to look like Napoleon?" he said caustically. "Napoleon with the frying pan!"

WITHOUT taking his eyes from Caine's white, terror-stiffened face, Dave reached for the blank sheet on the desk—the confession sheet—set the pan down, dropped the paper into it, and slopped tea over it.

He held the vessel between them, dropped his eyes long enough for a quick scanning of the sheet.

"Look, Caine! It's coming back, just as it did on the check. Disappearing ink. Hmm, I should know something about that. Iodine and starch, maybe from the color. It fades out, but the tannin in tea brings it back. Somehow she got wise—maybe spilled the tea on the check—then she half

immersed it in the teapot so that anyone could get the idea. It's *your* finger that's cut, Caine!"

Desperation thawed Caine's muscles, frozen by terror. His fingers closed around the automatic.

Almost without thought, Dave Farr turned the pan half over as Caine drew his gun and squeezed the trigger. The automatic cracked and the polished steel clanked like a bell at the impact of the slug.

Dave drove forward, straightened his bent elbow. The pan slapped Caine's arm back against his belly. He went down, and Dave fell over him. Caine came up with the speed of a bounding ball, still holding his gun. He whipped around and brought it to bear on the prostrate Dave.

"Your career's done before it's started," he cried hoarsely.

The crash of a second gunshot filled the room. John Caine's face registered pained surprise. The automatic fell from his hand, his knees gave way and he pitched to the floor.

Dave Farr got up, grinning as though a murdered favorite aunt meant nothing to him.

The little gray figure of Miss Eliza Farr was no longer limp. She was on her feet, her eyes bright, the .32 revolver in her hand.

"Davie," she said anxiously, "I do hope I didn't kill Mr. Caine. I'd never forgive myself—"

DAVE laughed. "No, Auntie, you got 'im in the thigh. He's fainted from the shock. I almost did, too, when I got that cryptic phone call from you: '*Come quick*'; pretend you think I'm dead."

"My stars, Davie, that did sound queer, didn't it? But I couldn't say more. That scoundrel said he disconnected the phone, but I kept trying.

When I got you finally—he must have fixed the wires again—I didn't know whether he was still at the window listening. I had to be brief." She paused for breath. "When he came in, I was scared."

Dave grinned. "You had that gat in your hand, hidden under your hair. Why didn't you plug him then?"

"That's what scared me—if he'd found I was alive. I'd have had to shoot—and I might have killed him. I'd have felt like a murderess. But the fumes drove him out." She stopped again and surveyed him proudly. "You're a smart boy, Davie. You'll be a big detective some day."

"Shucks, Auntie, with a set-up like that, anybody—"

"Set-up, nothing! You had to figure practically everything out for your-

self. You didn't even know I was still alive until you started pawing over me. I was afraid then you'd give it away. You're an actor, too, Davie. Even after you saw that I'd cut my finger and made that bloodstain myself, you worked on his nerves till he just blew up."

"All right, Teahound, what about a drink?"

"Nothing but tea," Miss Farr said primly.

"Okay. Tea." Dave started humming *Tea for Two*.

"No, Davie. There'll be three for tea. Mr. Caine's waking up. He'll need a bracer when he sees this little gray ghost. Poor John, he was too addled to realize there was a blast of fresh air blowing down that mail chute right smack in my face."

WILL PEACE BRING CRIME?

DO THE years immediately following a war bring an increase in crime? This has been a much disputed question for the history of the movement of crime discloses irregularities that are impossible to explain. The lines of particular offenses do not follow gentle curves upward or downward, but are subject to sudden leaps with corresponding falls as the years go by. Probably the imitative instinct in criminals has much to do with these fluctuations. One sensational crime widely reported in the newspapers produces others of the same kind. How far the gangster films affect the problem is a matter of dispute also.

After the Napoleonic wars there was a striking increase of crime in England and during the World War this was quoted to prepare the world for a similar phenomenon after the Peace, but there was no increase in crimes of violence, instead there was a very notable decrease.

Many writers on crime have quoted prison statistics as a basis for their arguments, but these figures depend solely upon the efficiency of the police and the criminal courts. The only real material for comparison is the number of crimes reported to the police and figures of these are not accessible for comparison in all countries.

In Britain the apparent decrease of crime that followed the World War was due to causes independent of the moral well-being of the com-

munity. The Borstal system for the treatment of young offenders and the Probation Act had come into force a few years before the outbreak of war, and both have undoubtedly had some influence in reducing the volume of professional crime, though it is not to be supposed that the reduction in the daily average of persons undergoing imprisonment signifies that crime is progressively waning. The total daily average of the prison population in England and Wales has fallen by nearly half what it was in the last years before the World War, and 25 prisons have been closed.

Since petty offenses are often the product of want, the unemployment situation at certain times has some influence on the figures. Serious crimes may be the result of passion, impulse or premeditation; they may be committed to escape from threatened ruin, or crime may be deliberately adopted as a profession.

In the early 'sixties there was a sudden rise in crime figures and this was ascribed to the leniency of prison treatment. This was tightened up and the figures fell, but it is far from certain that the one had anything to do with the other.

A scrutiny of the criminal statistics of the last fifty years will show that there is a tide in crime, and that it is unwise to found arguments as to the reason why. And certainly no one can commit himself by stating that war is a factor either way.

—Elsie Winthrop.



"He's dead, you blundering flatfoot!" the doctor said



RED BLOOD AND GREEN SOAP

By
DALE
CLARK

**You can expect blood to come
from a wound; but green soap
isn't quite so bio . . . logical!**

"**D**EAD," the little doctor said. He got up from beside the body. He stared at Hanley's blue-clad height, and his words came cold with contempt. "You damned flatfoot. Putting on a tourniquet like that. You're a blundering, murderous fool. They ought to strip that badge off your chest, and I intend to see to it they do."

A cop had to render first aid; he'd be legally liable if he didn't. So ran

the state law. Jed Hanley was of the motorcycle traffic division, he'd been specially trained to handle accident cases, and there was no earthly excuse for the badly tied tourniquet that had come loose and let John Graham bleed to death.

"I don't understand it," mumbled Hanley.

"Yes, it's obvious you didn't understand what you were doing!" snapped little Dr. Wrenn.

"I mean, how it could've come loose," said Hanley thickly. The flashlight in his fist spilled a white circle onto the corpse. TK 9-15 said the motor grease daubed across Graham's forehead, telling the time Hanley had applied the tourniquet. Good first aid, that precaution. A lap robe from the wrecked car partly covered the portly, middle-aged form. That was more good first aid—keeping the victim warm.

Hanley had done a neat job of it, in all respects save one. His tourniquet, improvised from his necktie and pencil, had come loose. John Graham, never recovering consciousness from a fractured skull, had quietly and quickly bled to death through the gash in his wrist.

Dr. Wrenn said, "You didn't tie a square knot. That's why it slipped."

He picked his way along the canyon to the other man. Two attendants from the Emergency Station were lifting Arnold Keet onto their stretcher. Keet was a big man. He groaned, breathing gustily through gritted teeth. "My head. Ai, God, be careful."

Keet's eyes were dazed, with the dilated pupils that indicate head injury; he was pale, with the pallor and lowered pulse that symptomize shock.

Headlights were pulling to a halt on the road above. Officers Bain and Carter, of the Accident Investigation Detail, came scrambling down the steep, stony, brush-grown slope.

"This isn't on your beat, is it?" Bain questioned.

Hanley shook his head, glum. "I was patrolling the Boulevard extension, keeping traffic down to thirty-five miles an hour. I just happened to see headlights coming down the hill. One lamp smashed when they hit the fence, and the other went bouncing and bumping into the canyon."

"You got here first, then?" Carter

asked.

"Yes. Siren and throttle wide open. It didn't take me over a minute and a half."

THE crash squad men turned to the wreck. Graham's convertible had plowed and plunged for thirty yards before fetching up on its right side against a giant boulder. A reek of gasoline blanketed the machine with oppressive, choking fumes.

Hanley's voice was tired. Hanley was no rookie. He'd been six years a patrolman before he got his transfer to the motorcycle squad. More than a year ago he'd taken the examination and qualified himself for promotion to the Accident Detail. Hanley had a wife and two kids to provide for; he was no storybook hero at all, but just a good, decent, squareshooting cop. He knew now he wouldn't get the promotion, and he'd be lucky if he didn't lose his badge as Dr. Wrenn had threatened.

Hanley said in his tired voice, "They were both in it, and both unconscious. I got Graham out first. He'd managed to shut off the motor on the way down, but I figured a shorted wire might blow the whole mess to kingdom come. So I put on the tourniquet fast, because Keet was still under there, wedged between the car and the rock."

Little Dr. Wrenn was at his elbow. "That's no excuse! It doesn't take a split second longer to tie a square knot than a slipshod makeshift, if a man knows his business."

"Yeah," admitted Hanley, feeling a cold heaviness in the middle of him. He didn't see how, but in his frenzy of haste he must have failed to knot the tourniquet properly. A human life thrown away in a moment of negligence. . . .

Bain was writing in his notebook.

"You paid no more attention to Graham, after that?"

"I found a laprobe in the car, and I put that over him. Then I had to run up and stop a passing car. There was just a woman in it, alone, but at least I could send her for help."

"Her name?"

"I didn't take the name. I just waved her on."

"Paula Chanin," Dr. Wrenn said. "She called me, after she notified the Emergency Station."

"Gar Chanin's wife," mused Bain.

"Wonder what she was doing out here, alone. Well, go on."

Hanley said, "I hurried back to Keet. He was senseless, and I couldn't tell how bad he was hurt. It might have been a fractured neck or back or pelvis. Rough handling might be fatal, and I got him out of there by inches, as gently as I could."

"But how'd it happen?" Bain puzzled. "There weren't any skidmarks up on the road."

"I found this doodad," Hanley pointed his flashlight into the wreck. "That glass ball on the gear shift under the wheel. It's new. Graham had just put it on."

"How do you know?" Carter demanded.

"I found a small price tag gummed on it. A fresh tag, not soiled as it'd have been if he'd used it even a few days. I suppose he put it on today, and screwed it on too tight. It's split almost in half, you notice. Well," said Hanley, "it's a fairly steep hill above here and Graham must have decided to shift into second to save wear and tear on his tires and brakes. But when he went to shift, the already cracked knob came apart in his hand. Naturally, he was thrown off stride. He looked down, took his eyes off the road a second or so, and crashed through

the fence."

BAIN nodded. "Yeah, it's funny. Manufacturers pour millions of dollars into safety features. And then people turn around and install some damned accessory like that, a cut-price article that's never been tested at all."

Hanley said, "It was a fatal mistake for Graham. When he saw what was happening he made a wild grab for the ignition. The broken glass—it's as sharp as the devil—stuck out under the wheel at just the right angle to slash his wrist to the bone."

Dr. Wrenn huffed, "You're avoiding the main issue. No matter how it happened, John Graham's death was unnecessary. He was killed by your gross, blundering incompetence. I happen to know that a police officer can be prosecuted for not using due prudence and precaution under such circumstances. Graham was a friend of mine—and I don't intend to let this matter drop."

In total silence, Bain and Carter watched the grim little doctor pick up his bag and follow the stretcher crew up to the road. Then Bain turned and knelt beside John Graham's body.

"It looks like he's got you cold, Hanley," the crash car officer said uncomfortably. "The knot's all wrong. There isn't much defense for a man who discards standard first aid procedure in favor of some self planned method."

Hanley knew. There was no excuse or apology. He'd practiced enough, so tying the correct knot should have been practically second nature.

Bain sighed, "Well, it's out of our hands. It's up to the homicide squad and the coroner to decide whether there's evidence to support criminal charges against you. Your wisest move right now is to report to your station and turn in a written report on the

whole thing. You want to put your side of the story on the record right away."

"I guess so," Hanley agreed tonelessly. He owed it to Marie and the two kids to make the best possible statement of the case. He had no heart for it, though. There was room for only searing regret in his aching brain as he wheeled from that last glance at John Graham. A life snuffed out—because a cop's thick, hurrying fingers had slipped.

THE cop climbed up the canyon's slope, stiffly. The ambulance was gone, the doctor's car gone, too, and Hanley's motorcycle stood forlorn in the shine of the crash car's headlamps.

Hanley leaned against the broken fence, breathing hard and not from the climb. Some things a man doesn't really realize until he's alone, and face-to-face with his inner self.

Fool! the voice of self accusation whispered. *Blundering murderous fool. His blood is on your hands!*

He looked at his hands involuntarily—and sucked in his breath, spilled it explosively. Graham's car had crashed through the fence, taken a section of the guard rail with it. On the fresh, jagged splinters of the fence a gossamer of gold swayed captive in the breeze and auto glare.

Gold?

No; wool. Yellow wool. One woolen thread, that's what it was. Where someone had followed the fenceline and ducked through the break, turning just a bit too abruptly.

Hanley's breath sawed in his throat, a noisy sound of shock and incredulity. Doctor Wrenn was a little man in dapper oxford grey. Bain and Carter wore police blues, the ambulance crew hospital whites. Nobody in yellow had passed through that broken fence at all.

Nobody that Hanley had seen. . . .

Unseen, then, and surreptitiously there *had* been another.

"Bain—!" But he didn't say it, the shout died short of his lips. He crouched, instinctively put his head and shoulders as low as the road's level.

The car came fast. Its rubber screamed on the curve, the hurtling body of it split the night with full-throttled rush. Wind suction tugged at Hanley as he stood and stared after Paula Chanin.

Gar Chanin's wife. The one he'd hailed and sent for help. He remembered the aristocratic profile of her lovely face, haughty and spoiled. But what had she worn? It might have been something yellow—or green, or black, or any color. On that detail, Hanley's memory was a total loss.

He broke in a running lunge for his 'cycle, legged himself astride its saddle—and gave chase.

The road was a cement corkscrew glued into the hills. Paula Chanin's machine swooped and ran for it, winking red on the curves where she stabbed the brakes. Hanley's siren threw a halfmile scream of warning, and the car ahead shot faster around the next curve.

She was gone.

HANLEY throttled down, turned on a hairpin, and jogged back a hundred yards. He rode into a driveway and dismounted beside the gurgling car. Its steaming motor sent heat up from the floorboards as he looked in, held his flashlight to the ownership certificate under the wheel.

Gar Chanin's car.

Hanley swung, stared at the house. Black windows stared back, insolent. He advanced, perplexed. Maybe she hadn't gone in here at all. Maybe she'd just ducked into the handiest driveway, taking the chance he'd ride by. He

stood on the porch, and a window drape stuck out its white tongue at him. The window was open. Hanley put his head and shoulders into the outdraught of warm air.

Heels tick-tocked inside the house. Hanley 'muscled his six-foot leanness across the sill. The tick-tock stopped. There was a rustle like small scurrying animals. He tiptoed. A pale sliver of light seeped under a door. Hanley opened the door.

Gar Chanin's wife whirled from the open desk. A tiny flashlight on the desk backlighted her, and ran its track along the pointed gun.

She gasped, "I'll shoot!"

Hanley's flashbeam smote her. She was brunette, with a proud oval of face. Her breasts thrust against a sweater, and the sweater was yellow.

Hanley said with detached, family man calm: "Your slip's showing, Mrs. Chanin."

He'd been married long enough; he knew. Say that to a woman, and nine times out of ten her feminine response will be automatic. She can't help it, any more than her golfing husband can ignore the cry, "Fore!"

"What?" Gar Chanin's wife said. "Why, I'm not wearing—" But her eyes had dropped, the pointed gun wavering away as she peered down.

"Hah!" said Hanley, beside her. He grabbed the gun, and then held onto her arm. The sweater's sleeve was snagged. . . .

"Let go! Take your hands off me!"

Hanley said, "So you didn't go for help right away. You pulled over to the other side of the road, and followed me down there."

"I—that's a lie!"

"You caught your sweater on the fence, remember? I guess in the dark you didn't know you were leaving a thread there."

HER slimness grew taut, startled. The lifted breasts stayed poised, on the peak of a deep-drawn breath. A second slid by—another.

She relaxed, grimly. "I did? Well, how much is it going to cost me?"

"Cost—?"

"That's what you want, isn't it?" she gibed. "You've got my name. You know who my husband is, no doubt."

"He's a banker, and the fair-haired boy in the Reform League," Hanley said. "Our next Governor, maybe."

"It's very nice for you, having me in a position like this." She spoke with ironic scorn. "All right, it's true I stopped the car and went partway down there—close enough to see. I thought it might be Graham's convertible. I'd passed one as I came up the hill, the only car I did pass. He wasn't at home here, and that made it doubly likely."

"Here? This is John Graham's home?"

"I thought you knew that, too. Oh, well. You'd have found it out, anyway."

Hanley mused aloud. "You drove up here, and he wasn't home. So you turned around and followed—?"

Gar Chanin's wife said, "Please don't play cat-and-mouse games. Just name your price. If it's within reason, I'll pay. If not, you can have your nasty little scandal."

"Why did you come here to see him?" questioned Hanley.

"You go to blue blazes!"

"Graham was older 'n I am. And fat. It wouldn't be love. Hate, maybe." Hanley's tone gathered brute force. "What'd you hate him for? Enough to loosen that tourniquet and let him bleed to death?"

She swayed, wide-eyed. Her mouth puckered, made a bruised shape. "Death. . . . He's *dead*?"

"Don't you know it?"

She fell back a step. "Gar!" A thin sound, tinny in her swelling throat. "No, Gar! Don't!"

"You mean *my* slip's showing now?" Hanley asked. "That's an old one, sister." He laughed into her affrighted face. "Ha-ha, your husband isn't within ten miles of here—"

He pivoted. He knew Gar Chanin was in the room, all right. No woman, no matter how fine an actress, could make her face pale at will. Hanley's word's were meant for Chanin, not Chanin's wife. . . .

BUT Chanin was closer than he'd dreamed. Knuckles welted across Hanley's mouth, a hard punch with the added impetus of Hanley's pivoting weight to make it harder. The cop's knees buckled, one of them hitting the floor.

Hanley came up in a crouch, weaving. He dodged, but the next punch crazed and made his ear sing like a piano wire. He closed with Chanin then. Chanin wasn't soft, or easy. The banker had come up from farm boy beginnings, as he boasted in his political speeches. He matched Hanley in strength, and he was desperate, savage. Their bodies heaved and crashed into the desk.

Wood splintered loudly.

Hanley turned a hip into Chanin's viciously resisting bulk. He trapped a hand that was clawing for his throat, dragged it over his shoulder, and pitched Chanin in a flying mare.

Chanin got up, snarling. In the ruin of a desk, a telephone's dial tone hummed. A weight bounced off Hanley's skull.

"Paula! You little idiot, come on!" he heard Chanin roar.

Hanley got up from both knees this time. His head was spinning like a roulette wheel, from the candlestick

Paula Chanin had socked him with. He was perfectly conscious, but so dizzy his legs wanted to follow his head around in circles. The front door slammed. By the time he got it open, the Chanin sedan was racing down the driveway. Hanley stumbled to his motorcycle, and swore bitterly as he discovered the air had been valved from its front tire.

There was nothing to do except use the phone. He went back, flashlight in hand, but as he bent over the ruin of a desk he couldn't believe his eyes.

The desk was alive. It whined to itself in a low metallic tone, while a section of its veneered front shivered with ague. He touched it, and the hidden spring whirred, the secret drawer shot out into his hand.

Hanley's eyes widened over the bundle of IOUs. Each was signed by Paula Chanin. Each was payable to Arnold Keet, but Keet had endorsed the lot in John Graham's favor. The amounts varied from thirty to ninety dollars, and at a rough total the bundle ran over two thousand dollars.

Hanley phoned the nearest filling station on the Boulevard extension. In ten minutes a service truck arrived, and they loaded the motorcycle aboard. Hanley told the attendant to stop on the curve, where a Homicide Detail car was parked alongside the crash car. He examined the splintered fence. As he had expected, the bit of yellow yarn was gone. There was nothing to prove it had ever been there, just his word against the two Chanins. "Drive on," he grumbled.

HOWEVER, he ran into a bit of compensatory luck while the attendant was hissing air into the tire. As he paced the filling station driveway, Hanley's eye fell on a cardboard display in the office window. He jerked his thumb at the highly ornamental gear

shift balls.

"You didn't happen to sell one of these to John Graham, did you?"

"Nope," came the answer. "We marked 'em down to 69c special, but accessories just won't move nowadays. Nobody puts any money into a car when they ain't sure how long its tires will last."

Hanley stood thought-struck. The price tag on the hunk of glass in the wrecked car had been 69c. Since it was a special price, doubtless the item had come from this very station. But if Graham hadn't made the purchase, then the complexion of matters changed completely.

"Made a phone call from here," Hanley muttered under his breath.

"Yeah. A dame did. Swell looker."

"I meant before that," Hanley said.

"Lotsa customers use the phone."

"I think you'll get a chance to pick this one out of a police line-up," Hanley grunted. He swung his leg over the 'cycle and chugged away.

Neon lights thickened as he journeyed into the suburb. The cop had patrolled the neighborhood enough to know where he'd find Dr. Wrenn's office. It was a modernistic fronted lay-out, just off the main drag. Hanley went in through a glass-bricked foyer, found the entrance door unlocked. An inner office buzzer sounded as he went into the waiting room.

"Doc," Hanley said. "Doc!"

He hesitated, and then opened the inner door.

The little doctor was more grim than ever. He sprawled on his own examining table, with one of his own scalpels plunged deep in his throat.

There was blood on the floor. There was green fluid—the green, liquid soap that doctors use—spilt from a bottle that was smashed on the floor.

Hanley's pulse got thick in his throat.

He stared at the little doctor a moment, and then lurched to the phone. He barked out two brief messages, one to the filling station he'd just left, and the other to police headquarters.

All the time he kept peering at the little puddle of green on the floor, not at the blood at all.

He swung outside, hunched low in the saddle as he skid-turned onto the main drag. He opened the siren, split the street up dead-center. The address was stamped hard into his memory, because cops always take addresses in accident cases. He found it an apartment building, a nice location overlooking a park.

The desk clerk breathed out a number. "307, but—"

Hanley barged into the self-operated elevator. He barged out, and pounded on 307.

ARNOLD KEET opened the door.

"You're okay?" Hanley grunted.

"I was lucky," Keet said. "The doctor turned me loose. Told me I should take it easy for a day or so."

"Wrenn?"

"Naturally. I'm not a charity case to be taken to an Emergency Station and a police surgeon."

"I thought you weren't," Hanley said, "after I found these."

Keet looked at the IOUs. His large face was collected, calm. "Oh, yes. Mrs. Chanin. But I didn't get face value for those."

"What's the story?"

"It's an old one," Keet said. "Chanin's one of those sobersides, bluestocking, model husbands. Paula is—she's different. She craves excitement. It takes the form of gambling, playing bridge for high stakes."

"With you?"

"There's a crowd," Keet said. "The Country Club crowd at Farhaven. Gra-

ham used to play. Dr. Wrenn took a hand occasionally. Paula Chanin was a regular. Only she played for excitement, which isn't the way to play bridge."

"It's evident she lost money!" muttered Hanley.

"She ran into a streak of bad cards," Keet said. "That's when she started handing out IOUs. I knew, of course, that I could collect any time I wanted to go to Gar. If I wanted to kick up a filthy stink."

"Gar didn't know?"

"What do you think?"

"I guess he didn't," Hanley said. "Where does Graham fit into this?"

Keet said, "He made me a cash offer for her IOUs. I gave her twenty-four hours to raise the money, and when she didn't, I turned them over to him."

"What'd he want with them?"

"Politics. A gambling wife is no asset to a reforming politician. Photostats of those IOUs could do Chanin a hell of a lot of harm, if they got broadcast over the state when he runs for Governor. It'd hurt him where he's strongest, in the rural districts, and with the ladies. The average housewife wouldn't sympathize much with Paula's gambling away more money than most families earn in a year."

KNUCKLES were drumming on the door. Keet opened it, and then lurched back, open-mouthed.

"Get your hands up," Gar Chanin ordered. "Both of you."

Chanin was white-faced. He was desperate. The shine in his burning eyes looked downright crazy.

"You blackmailing rat," he said to Keet. "You're not going to drag my name through the muck. You'll give me those IOUs, or I'll kill you."

"Graham—" began Keet weakly.

"I know all about Graham!" de-

clared Gar Chanin, verging on hysteria. "Wrenn, too! You're all a pack of scoundrels, luring my wife on to destroy me!"

Paula Chanin tiptoed into the apartment, her face as scarlet as that of a ten-year-old caught in a jam pot.

"How do you mean, they lured her on?" Hanley asked.

"Just what I say. They let her win small amounts at first, encouraged her until the foul, damnable disease of gambling was in her blood!"

"When'd you find all this out?"

Chanin perspired. "Today. She asked me for two thousand dollars, on the pretext her mother needed an operation. I put through a long-distance call, and discovered the lie. But I gave her the money anyway. I hid myself in the tonneau of the car to see where she went with it." He faced Keet. "She came here first. The clerk told her you'd left with Graham. She drove to his home. He wasn't there, either. You didn't want her money! You were determined to ruin me!"

Hanley's straining ears caught footsteps. His lean bboy gathered itself inside his uniform. There was a tap at the door.

Chanin's head turned involuntarily toward the sound. Hanley stepped swiftly and lashed his fist against Chanin's jaw. The banker fell.

"Come in," Hanley said.

It was the filling station attendant.

"One of these guys?" Hanley murmured.

A coverall sleeve came up, pointing. "Yeah. Sure. Him."

KEET squatted swiftly, snatched the gun from Chanin's limp hand. Hanley went for the heavy gun in his holster. *Click!* That was Keet triggering. *Click! Click!* But Chanin had been bluffing, and the weapon was

empty. Chanin wasn't a killer.

"Hah!" grunted Hanley, belting Keet a lick with his Service Positive. The big man crumpled, twitched on the floor. Hanley rolled him over, and there was a wet spot on Keet's coat front.

Hanley opened the coat, but he had to hunt awhile in the coat's lining before he found the pocket at all.

"Holdout," he muttered then. To the amazed-eyed Paula Chanin he explained, "The guy's a card shark, a crook. No wonder he took you to the cleaners. He generally won in those bridge games, didn't he?"

The filling station chap said: "I thought the sharks just played poker."

Hanley said, "Hell, no. Poker's one of the toughest games to rig. Bridge is one of the easiest, especially around a country club where the stakes are high but women play. He could slip in a cold deck from the holdout, just leaning over to light a lady's cigarette."

"Doubled and redoubled," gasped Chanin's wife.

Hanley helped the groaning Chanin sit up. "Redoubled?" the banker asked. "What's that?"

"You wouldn't understand," said Hanley, "but Keet could win forty, fifty dollars on one trick hand. But I guess Graham got wise to him. I guess he made Mr. Keet turn over those IOUs by threatening to expose the guy. Keet must have had some strong motive to kill him."

"Kill—? But he was in the wreck, too!"

Hanley said no. "It goes back to the gear shift accessory Keet stole from the filling station today. What really happened is that he slugged Graham, and jumped out of the car before it went through the fence. Then he ran to the wreck, and used the broken half of the gear shift doodad to open the artery in the wrist. After that, he wedged him-

self in and pretended to have been there all along.

"It was neat enough, except that I got there before Graham had time to bleed to death. That's why he had to go over and loosen the tourniquet when I ran up to the road to stop your car, Mrs. Chanin. I didn't suspect it at the time, because he showed all the symptoms of concussion and shock—dilated pupils, pallor, and feeble pulse."

Chanin was incredulous. "How could he possibly fake those symptoms?"

"Belladonna would do those things," Hanley said, "and maybe there are other drugs. It fooled me, because I'm only a first aider. But it didn't fool Doc Wrenn, not when the Doc got a good look at him. So he had to kill Wrenn, to cover up his first murder. And to cover up his second—"

HANLEY fumbled in the holdout pocket, extricated slivers of glass.

"He poured off a vial of liquid soap from a bottle in the office, and smashed the bottle. That was to sprinkle a clue on somebody's else's clothes, in case the chase got too hot for him.

"I knew that," Hanley went on, "all along. Because there was just a pool of soap on the floor. It wasn't tracked around, as it would have been if the bottle got smashed in a fight."

He broke off, listened. The others heard it, too. The sound of a siren.

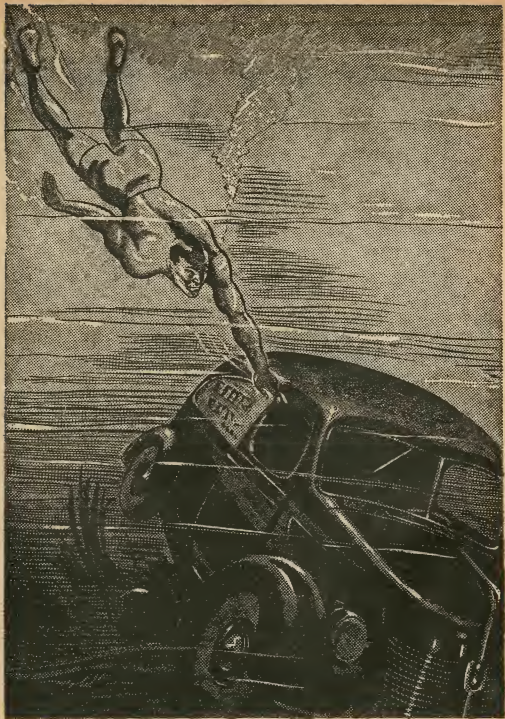
"Homicide squad," Hanley said.

Paula Chanin gulped, "But how could they—so soon—nobody sent for them—?"

"I did," said Hanley. "Awhile ago."

"You knew he was the guilty one?" demanded Chanin.

"It pointed that way. First, the piece of glass that Graham didn't buy. And then Wrenn being dead. It added up, because in my own mind I was sure I tied that tourniquet right all the time."



It was the panel truck—at the bottom of the quarry!

A MAN'S BEST FRIEND

By NORMAN WHYTE

I WANTED action. Instead, I sat twiddling my thumbs in the police cruiser, swallowing dust from the trucks that rolled along the alley in back of the newly completed row of two-family houses. The trucks carried building materials to further rows of similar houses under construction. Every time they rumbled past, the air filled with dry lime from the pile where a sack had fallen off a truck and burst open. I wondered why the devil someone hadn't shoveled it up and carried it away.

Life was a sequence of minor annoyances.

It was a brisk fall day, the quail season was half over, and I still hadn't taken my shotgun off the wall. Jeff, my Irish setter, moped around home wondering what was wrong with me.

There wasn't anything wrong with me—except boredom. Since Art Nelson fractured his right wrist and Jim Harrell went to the hospital for an appendectomy, I had been working 16 hours a day, including days off. My boss, Chief of Police Larry Stearns, was up against it and I had to help out.

The cruiser was parked at the side

of the rough, pine shack that housed the field offices of the Stacy Construction Company, builders of the huge Windsor Village development. The payroll truck was due in half an hour and I was assigned to Art Nelson's regular job of hanging around while the dough was counted and passed out to the four or five hundred workmen.

Buck Nixon, paymaster for Stacy, stepped out of the shack and said: "Hi, Pete."

My answering grin froze when I saw his companion. I nodded to Buck and said to the other man: "Howdy, Mr. Gant."

The stocky little man with the small blob of ruddy nose looked coldly at me, his pale blue eyes protruding slightly. "Hello, Williams," he said, shortly.

It burned Arlington Gant up to be called mister, and he knew that I knew it. He liked to be called Captain, but I didn't consider he rated it. He'd organized a bunch of dumb young guys around Cherrydale into what he called a Home Protective Corps, after the National Guard was mobilized. But Larry Stearns and I didn't believe the

Pete Williams had two good friends: his dog and Art Nelson. Then Nelson died in a robbery, and Williams found out what a dog's loyalty means!

cops needed any self-appointed fuehrer to help us maintain order in our quiet little city.

I often wondered where Gant got the money to keep up a flashy car and fairly expensive house. He never did anything around Cherrydale except try to stir up prejudice against people he didn't like and play politics—always on the losing side. Sometimes, though, he'd disappear for a couple of days and he always had plenty of dough when he returned.

WHEN Gant drove off, I asked Nixon whether the Home Protective Corps was going to take over the payroll policing.

Buck shot an accurate stream of tobacco juice at a piece of two-by-four and snickered. "Maybe they better at that, the way the Cap'n talks about the police force," he said. "Seems as though you boys ain't keeping proper track of the crooks around these parts."

I said there weren't any crooks around Cherrydale, and asked him what Gant wanted.

He shook his head. "He's dropped in several times the last week or so, but he never seemed to seek anything but conversation.

"By the way," he added, "I had to fire your pal, Tige Davidson, the other ev'ning."

I scowled at him. "What the blazes for?"

"Just too shiftless to live," he said. "And then the so-and-so threatened to get even with me, after I'd kept him on two weeks longer than I should just because I was sorry for his wife."

"Oh, Tige's all right," I said. "But he's a ball player, not a brick-layer. You got to make allowances for a guy who's an artist."

"He sure could pound that old tomato," admitted Buck. "And what an

arm! Man, those pegs from deep right field used to hit the catcher's mitt on the line. It's a shame he was kicked out of the league."

"Tige was the goat for the sharpshooters," I said. "He'd never got drunk during the playoff series with Chesterbrook if the gamblers hadn't started him off by spiking his drinks. I always thought the club should have given him another chance instead of blacklisting him."

Buck said: "Well, he's sure lost without his baseball. Just willing to set around and let his wife take in washing."

I said that seemed to be the case and then looked around in surprise as Art Nelson pulled up in his coupe and got out. He was wearing his police uniform, but his wrist was still in a cast held up by a sling over his shoulder.

"Looking for someone, Officer?" I inquired, politely.

"Yeh, you." His gray eyes were quizzical. "Go on, beat it. You've been wanting to hunt birds for a week. Here's your chance. I'll watch this joint while Buck short-changes the help."

I told him he was crazy, but he got stubborn. And when Art got determined about something, his face looked like it had been hacked out of a piece of granite by someone that wasn't too expert with the chisel. Rough, but strong, if you know what I mean.

I thought about Jeff getting fat lolling around home and my protests got weaker. Finally, I let Art give me a shove with his good hand, got into his coupe and drove off.

I'd give my right eye if I hadn't.

JEFF was delighted that I'd finally regained my senses, and galloped around like a fool pup when we started

out with the shotgun. I ignored his antics, knowing he'd settle down to business as soon as we got into the field.

He did, and we had a swell afternoon. Jeff found five coveys in all and I had a good bag when we turned down the rutted trail through the big woods toward the Nelson cottage on Sleepy Hollow Road.

Doris was out cutting flowers for the table.

I displayed the bag of quail. "See," "I said, "I am a good provider. Now will you marry me?"

She pushed a wisp of reddish-brown hair into place and wrinkled her small nose at me. "On that theory," she pointed out, "It would be hard to choose between you and Jeff."

The setter grinned at her.

"At that," she continued. "You might be better than that brother of mine. The big lummoX promised to drive me into town to do some shopping, and now he's disappeared with the car."

"Your jalopy is parked down the road a mile or so," I informed her. "Where we abandoned it when we hit into the fields. Meanwhile, your brother makes it possible for me to offer you half my birds by standing watchful guard over the Stacy payroll."

There was a startled expression in her hazel eyes. "Pete," she said, sharply. "You didn't let Art go back to work with that wrist still in a cast?"

I sighed. "Need I point out how futile it is to argue with a Swede?" I said. "Besides, Officer Nelson with one wrist is better than any other cop on the force with two."

I was wrong—damnably wrong.

WE GOT the news over home-made grape juice and cookies in the Nelsons' pine-paneled living room. I

automatically turned the radio to the police wave-length and waited for the preliminary hum that showed a broadcast was coming.

Ed Schuster's voice was vibrant with excitement as he started his announcement and I became tense. I'd never heard anything but an impersonal drone from him before.

It hit us squarely between the eyes and left us numb of mind and body.

It was a three-state alarm for two men—wanted for holdup and murder; Two men in a black, panel-body delivery truck who snatched the Stacy payroll and shot and killed a policeman—Arthur Nelson—in their getaway. The paymaster, Buck Nixson, had also been slain.

Schuster gave the usual warning to proceed with caution: "These men are armed and may be expected to resist arrest. Number One is six feet, one hundred eighty pounds—" But I was too dazed to hear any more.

Jeff knew that something was terribly wrong. His warm, brown eyes were anxious as he nuzzled my hand and whimpered tentatively. I patted his silky, red head absently as my fingers curled with itching for the heavy .45 still slung in a hip holster, even on a hunting trip.

After seconds that seemed like eternity, I lifted miserable eyes to look at Doris. All the color had been drained from her fresh, young face. One hand was frozen in midair half way to her mouth. Her lips were tight and her nostrils distended as she fought for control of herself. Moisture was showing in her glazed eyes.

She caught my glance and her expression changed to a terrible hardness. She stared at me without recognition for an instant as though I was something that had just crawled out from under a log. Then she said with meas-

ured deliberation: "Get out. Get out and don't ever come back. You left a crippled man to do your work while you went hunting."

I started up as hysteria came into her voice, but she waved me back imperiously.

"No! Don't come near me—just get out. And never let me see you again."

It was like being lashed across the face with rawhide.

"Doris!" I pleaded. "Don't take it that way. It's just one of those horrible senseless things. I'll get them—before God, I'll get them if it costs me my life!"

She rose from her chair, steadied herself and walked into her bedroom without a backward glance.

I called her mother from the kitchen, numbed some sort of clumsy explanation, and rushed from the house.

I'VE SEEN my share of sudden death without losing a cop's objectivity, but one long look at Art's body was all I could take.

He had pitched forward on his face in the dusty alley and the back of his head, where the slug came out, was a bloody mess. I thought of the twinkle in his gray eyes that belied the grimness of his set jaw when he was pretending to be tough with someone. I went to the side of the paymaster's shack and was sick.

Buck Nixon was dead inside the shack and his helper, a kid of about twenty, was having his head bandaged by an ambulance doctor. I pushed in and questioned him before he was taken to the hospital.

The stickup had been a smooth performance, indicating a job by professionals. The kid hadn't seen the first part of it, but apparently what had happened was this:

The armored truck which brought

the dough had left, and Nixon and the kid were counting the money and stuffing it into pay envelopes. Art was slouching outside the door. A heavy truck carrying sewer pipe had just passed when a black, panel-body delivery truck pulled up and stopped. The kid had given only a casual glance through the window and wasn't sure, but he believed the only lettering on the truck said something like "Gem Decorating Service."

A tall, well-built man stepped out and asked Art where Job Number 56 was, remarking he had been called to patch up some plaster. Art told the guy to inquire inside. Meanwhile, the driver had got out and was wiping dust off the windshield, leaving the motor running.

The kid said he was slugged unconscious when he unsuspectingly reached for a handkerchief in his hip pocket just as the big bandit stepped inside the shack. He hadn't had a good look at either crook and, of course, didn't know what happened from then on.

But it appeared the kid's unknowing false move had touched things off. The big guy had shot Nixon—the driver had burned down Art—they had scooped up the dough in some sort of sack and beat it.

By now the place was jammed with company officials and workmen, but none of them had arrived in time to see more than the rear end of the delivery truck as it roared away.

The best Nixon's helper could do in the way of description was the thought the big bandit was about 6 feet, 180 pounds, dark complexion, wearing blue coveralls over a tan work shirt and a plasterer's white peaked cap pulled down over his forehead. The kid had a vague idea the driver had worn an oversize cap above large chauffeur's goggles, a voluminous gray raincoat,

with collar up around the chin, and a tiny black moustache under a small nose. He was sure the driver was not over 5 feet 6 inches, but said the raincoat was too concealing for him to make any weight estimate.

Larry Stearns showed up with a state trooper and the three of us went over the place, both inside and out, for clues.

We didn't find any—at least any we could recognize. The alley was too dusty to hold tire marks and neither bandit appeared to have dropped anything like they do in detective stories—not even a match book cover with a night club name on it.

We had Frenchy Le Prevost, our technical man, go over the shack for finger prints, but with no hope of finding any we could use.

Larry Stearns was white with fury, but he didn't take any of his rage out on me. He would have been justified in kicking me off the force, but I guess he knew I'd already been punished worse than anything he could do to me.

After we'd finished our painstaking search, the chief told me to wait for him at the station. I slumped back into Art's coupe, where Jeff was waiting for me, and left.

I SAT staring at the police radio, only half hearing Ed Schuster's now weary voice repeating instructions to the men out on the dragnet. They thought the bridges across the river had been blocked in time to prevent an escape into the next state, which left the city and its western suburbs as the most likely location for the bandits' hideout. They figured the pair hadn't gone far out of town because of the state highway troopers.

The door banged open and Jeff gave a warning growl, his neck hair bristling. I turned to see a man wearing a

cab driver's cap stumble in. He skirted Jeff warily and said to me bitterly: "The dirty rats got my cab and eighty-six bucks."

I wearily pulled out a complaint form. I didn't give a damn about a cheap hacker stickup with Art dead and his killers at large.

"Okay, buddy," I said. "Let's have it."

His name was Joe Byers, he was 29, and so forth. But I jerked to attention when he told me he'd been hired at Twentieth and Overlea streets. That was only ten blocks from the Stacy job. His fares had directed him into the country, robbed him and taken his hack, leaving him tied to a tree.

I questioned him minutely about their description, and relaxed. The man didn't match up with the bandit leader's description. The cabbie said he was a little guy, about 5 feet 6 inches, 140 pounds and wearing a Homburg hat and brown suit. His companion was a girl about 5 feet, 95 pounds with dark hair and wearing a blue dress.

The cabbie squawked that a valuable diamond ring had been grabbed, along with his wallet and cab. He said he had to get the dough back some way; it was company money.

The other details were short and to the point. His passengers had directed him to leave the highway and go up Sleepy Hollow Road. When safely away from houses, the man stuck a gun in his back. The girl lifted his wallet and ring. Then they marched him into a nearby thicket and tied him to a tree. Some fifteen minutes after he heard the cab drive away, he managed to free himself. He hiked back to the main highway and thumbed a ride into town.

I said: "When did all this happen?"

He glanced at a fancy wrist watch

and calculated. "About an hour ago—that'd be about three twenty," he told me.

I told him we'd work on it and let him know. He said he'd grab a bus to his apartment and wait until he heard from me.

"Nice looking mutt," he said, glancing at Jeff. "What's its name?"

"He's no mutt," I said, shortly. "That's why his name is Jeff."

The setter lay languidly at my feet, but his eyes never left the hacker. The guy shrugged and said: "Too bad he ain't a bloodhound." Then he left.

Larry Stearns came in after awhile looked at me morosely and went into his private office without saying anything. I sat looking at my desk top. I was frantic to get started on the trail of Art's killers, but I had to have a plan of campaign. And there seemed no place to start.

The state police would be scouring the highways, and the city cops would be probing into every part of town. But none had the fervent personal interest that would drive them past the point of exhaustion, if necessary.

DAYLIGHT was fading when my brain wracking was interrupted by the brusque entrance of Arlington Gant. He glared at me and said: I might have expected to find you here doing nothing."

I held my temper and asked him what he wanted. He said nothing I could do, and demanded to see Stearns. I called Larry.

"As my Home Protective Corps is not yet fully organized. Gant told him, "I feel it my duty to turn over any clues to the police, incompetent as they are."

"Never mind the cracks," said Larry, quietly. "What have you got?"

"Probably nothing of interest to your

Boy Wonder here," said Gant, looking at me scornfully. "Merely the solution of the case that proves so baffling to the police." He paused for effect and then went on: "That bum, Tige Davidson, was seen by one of my men a short while ago flashing a big bankroll in Porter's poolroom. You may not know that Davidson was recently discharged by Nixon, the Stacy paymaster, and threatened to get even."

Stearns looked thoughtful. News that Tige had a bankroll was a surprise. He'd never made any serious money since he was kicked out of professional baseball.

Gant's pale eyes were vindictive. "If a mere citizen may make a suggestion," he added. "It would be that you investigate any underworld connections of Officers Nelson and Williams. I don't imagine this payroll robbery could have been planned and executed without collusion on the part of someone in authority."

I leaped forward, but Larry held me back with a massive paw on my arm.

"Why, you cheap—!" I panted. "I'll smash your face if you dare even hint Art Nelson had anything to do with that job—and Art burned down by those rats."

"He could have been double-crossed by his own gang," said Gant, coolly.

"It would also be interesting to know," he went on, hurriedly, "how it happened that the crippled officer Nelson happened to replace the uncrippled officer, Williams, just in time for the robbery."

I tore loose from Larry's grasp and started for Gant. It wasn't too hard to break away, I noticed.

The self-appointed fuehrer backed up hurriedly and barked: "Now, wait a minute, Williams. I don't want to have to have you locked up—yet."

I moved steadily toward him and he

scurried behind a desk. Then Larry halted me with a sharp command I couldn't ignore.

"Hold it, Pete!" he ordered. "Later, maybe. But not in the station house."

Gant looked at Larry meaningly. "I don't blame Williams for getting upset," he sneered. "I expect some things I've said hit pretty close to home. Meanwhile, I'm warning you my home protectors will be ready to take over this case within 48 hours if the police haven't solved it in that time—and I feel sure the public will back me up." He turned on his heel and left before Larry could reply.

The boss glanced at me, sighed and said: "Oh, hell." Then he walked back to his office and slammed the door.

ALMOST immediately there was a tap at the window to the side of the building. I went over and found Tige Davidson crouching in the shadows outside.

He put a finger to his lips as I started to speak and whispered quickly: I heard what that feller said. Don't believe him, Pete. He's a southpaw all the way through. I never had nothing to do with no robbery. I been hunting all afternoon."

He paused for emphasis and his brown eyes glowed at me. "But, Pete," he continued. "I did see Gant hisself driving a black, panel-body truck into the big woods off Sleepy Hollow Road 'bout an hour ago."

"The hell you did!" I said, startled. I looked around to call Larry. When I turned back, Tige Davidson was slipping swiftly away into the shrubbery. I just got a glimpse of his shaggy hair and the back of his ancient brown windbreaker when he disappeared. I vaulted over the window sill, but he had too much of a start, and I returned empty-handed.

Larry sent some cops out to bring in both Gant and Davidson for questioning. Then he and I chewed over what we'd been told by the pair.

"Mighty peculiar," I said, thoughtfully, "how both Gant and Tige seem to know stuff about the stickup that won't be made public till the morning papers get out.

"For instance, how did Gant know about Tige getting fired and threatening Nixon? And how did he know I was supposed to be on the job at Stacy's today instead of Art?"

Larry stroked a stubble of beard and looked at me.

I went on: "And how did Tige know about a black panel-body truck being used in the holdup if he's been hunting all afternoon? To say nothing of where did Tige get the bankroll Gant said he had?"

"It's also kind of funny how the only time Art happened to sub for you is the day a stickup is pulled," mused Larry.

I glared at him.

"Now wait a minute," he hurried on. "Don't get sore. I never believe nothing that fellow Gant says, but I'm thinking how it might look to the state cops—or the prosecutor."

THE STATE police found the missing taxicab early the next morning. It had been driven into some woods off the main highway, several miles from where the driver said he was held up. Neither Gant nor Davidson had been located yet, so I ran out to look at it. There were no discernible clues and the cab was undamaged.

This wasn't far from the big woods off Sleepy Hollow Road where Tige said he saw Gant driving the truck, so I left the police cruiser alongside the highway and scouted across country.

Jeff was with me and he couldn't figure why I didn't have the shotgun, but he was glad of a chance to romp without having to do any work. I can always think better when I'm away from what passes for civilization and I mulled over the few facts we had as I strolled along under the high canopy of oaks, tulip poplars and occasional pines.

There was plenty phony about the stories of both Gant and Davidson, yet the pot-bellied, red-nosed Gant didn't seem to fit the description of either killer, and I couldn't see the harmlessly eccentric Davidson as the murderer of a man who had been his friend.

I was more suspicious of the cab driver, even though his passengers didn't fit what we believed to be the description of the bandits. But I had nothing remotely resembling evidence. The cabbie had said he'd lost a valuable ring as well as his wallet in the stickup, yet he was wearing an expensive wrist watch when he reported at the station—and I hadn't been able to detect any mark on his fingers indicating he'd ever worn a ring. Jeff had shown he didn't like the man, but that also wouldn't prove anything in court.

Meanwhile, my friend since early boyhood, Art Nelson, lay on a cold undertaker's slab with part of his face shot away, and Doris—the girl I planned to marry—was blaming me for her brother's death. I thought of the happy times the three of us had enjoyed together and couldn't realize it could never happen again. I wanted to smash my fists against a tree trunk.

I didn't find anything of interest until I reached the abandoned road over which stone once was hauled from a quarry deep in the woods. The thick mat of dead leaves had been disturbed. People sometimes drove up here for picnics, but it was late in the year for that sort of thing now.

I followed the signs until I lost them on an outcropping of rock almost at the edge of the quarry, which long since had filled with water and now was used only as a summer swimming hole.

Jeff had disappeared on private business and the hush of the forest was broken only by a squirrel scampering over dry leaves.

I was about to turn back when I realized there was a false element in the sylvan setting. I looked around puzzled—then I got it. There were splotches of oil on the surface of the quarry pool!

Opaque shadows made it impossible to see much below the surface. I stripped off my clothes and tossed them over the nearest bush. I nerved myself for the shock of cold water and dived in. Down, down, I went until my fingers touched a smooth surface.

I made out the outline of a panel-body delivery truck!

MY lungs were almost bursting and I came back to the surface to gulp in fresh air. Then I went down again—three times in all. But I could determine nothing except that there were no bodies in the driver's compartment. The rest must wait for a tow truck with winch and steel cable.

I shook water from my shivering body and went back for my clothes.

They were gone!

I was dumbfounded, then sore as hell. I whistled for Jeff and he showed up in a minute or two carrying my shorts. There's no denying a man's best friend is his dog.

But the setter couldn't tell me anything more and I spent twenty minutes looking for the rest of the stuff without any luck. It had disappeared completely—including my gun and holster.

I couldn't go back to the highway and be kidded the rest of my life;

neither could I stay skulking in the woods. I remembered an old shack once used by a hunt club and set out for it. Maybe I could at least find a discarded pair of overalls. Jeff again slipped off on personal affairs.

I stopped to reconnoiter at the edge of the clearing in the rear of the shack and could see no signs of life. But when I rounded the front corner, I froze in dismay. A good-looking blonde clad in a nifty play suit sat in a rustic chair reading a true detective magazine.

She looked up and her eyes widened.

"I beg your pardon," I blurted out.

"Oh, that's all right with me," she said, with a slight smile. "But you better take them off before Mrs. Bethune sees you."

"Them?" I said, still stunned.

"Yes, the shorts," she said, impatiently. "She won't like it for you to be wearing them."

"You mean I should take them off?" I said, desperately.

She looked at me curiously, then laughed shortly. "Oh, you mean because I'm dressed," she said. "We rent this place and even Mrs. Bethune admits it's too chilly to sit out here in the woods without any clothes on."

I was further out of my depth than ever, but I was beginning to be able to take in the scenery. And, boy, it was worth seeing. The blonde was really built. Her shapely white legs had it all over those of the girl on the magazine cover. Dark, arched eyebrows, dark eyes and full, red lips made a striking contrast to her blonde hair. There was nothing inexperienced about the assistance nature had received. The only incongruous note was where the left side of her face had been sunburned except for the upper part of her forehead and a white circle around her left eye. Her nose had started to peel a little on the left side.

She intercepted my stare and frowned.

"Someone stole the rest of my clothes," I explained, hastily.

Her lips pursed in speculation and her eyes narrowed a bit.

"Just where did you come from?" she asked.

I gestured toward the woods. "I was swimming in the old quarry. When I got out, my clothes were gone. I remembered this shack and thought I might at least find an old pair of trousers. But I never expected to see a girl here."

She rose from her chair with a lithe movement. "I'm afraid you're trespassing," she said bluntly. "This is the Bethune Health Camp—for nudists."

I looked around in alarm, but didn't see any naked people coming at me from out of the woods. "Where's everybody?" I asked.

"The camp's closed for the season," she informed me. "But my husband is a bird lover and Mrs. Bethune rented us this cottage for a few weeks. The regular camp members come only on weekends this time of year."

"Then you've seen no one but Mrs. Bethune the last day or so?" I inquired.

"Of course not," she said. "Why?"

I made an airy gesture. "Oh, nothing," I said, carelessly. "One of my neighbors thought he saw a truck drive into the woods in this direction, and I just wondered what it would be doing around here."

Her eyes flickered almost imperceptibly. "A truck?" she said. "Why no, there's been nothing—."

SHE was interrupted by an angry oath and I turned to see a big guy striding out of the cottage doorway, bearing down on me in determined fashion. He was well-muscled and

wearing only sneakers, tan shorts and a blue polo shirt. He had beetling black eyebrows and thin lips.

He glared at me and demanded to know what I was trying to pull. The girl stepped back a pace or two.

I looked him over coolly and started to explain.

He cut me off curtly. "Never mind the guff," he barked. "I saw you making passes at Blondie."

I stuck my chin in his face and said: "Now listen, mister—."

It was a mistake. It gave him a too good a target— and he had a left jab that flicked out with the power of Joe Louis. I picked myself up and waded in, but my bare toe stubbed against a sharp rock and I was off balance when he sunk his right up to the wrist in my middle.

Blondie scooted up and grabbed his arm while I sat in the weeds, gasping for breath.

"No, no, Harry," she whispered. "Don't you know better than to start anything around here."

Harry grunted and watched me. I sat up slowly and said if he'd wait just a minute we could go on where we left off.

Harry took a step forward, but the blonde jerked him by the arm fiercely and gave him a stinging slap in the face with her other hand. He took it without a glance at her.

"Okay," he said to her over his shoulder. "He can beat it. But he better not snoop around here any more. Damned countryman."

I got up, but the blonde pushed between us and faced me with alarmed eyes. "Please go," she begged. "Harry's just so jealous."

I shrugged. "All right," I said, finally. "But I may see Harry again some time." She grabbed him tighter and he merely stood glaring as I walked

back toward the woods.

I slipped behind some bushes and watched them. They were scowling and whispering at each other. They looked in my direction a couple of times, but I knew they couldn't see me.

There seemed no use to spy any longer, so I imitated the call of the western meadowlark. Jeff soon loped up, tongue sweating, to find out what I wanted. Neither of the couple had glanced my way when I gave Jeff the piercing whistle that was our private signal.

I STILL hadn't solved the problem of clothing, but I got a break when I finally stumbled footsore out of the woods near Tom Elston's place on Sleepy Hollow Road. There was no one home, but the door was unlocked and I borrowed shoes, shirt and a pair of old trousers. Tom didn't have a phone, so I started up the road toward town.

Then I got another surprise. A late model brown coupe was parked off the road where a disused driveway had once penetrated the woods in the direction of the nudist camp. The reason it was no longer used, I discovered, was because a plank bridge over a creek had been carried away by a flood and the only way to cross was by foot over some large flat stones. I noticed the only recent shoe prints were of two men—headed into the woods. Otherwise, the soft ground at the edge of the stream was undisturbed.

Still no cars had passed and I trudged on toward town. Jeff suddenly shot ahead, yelping gleefully and I saw Doris Nelson picking apples off a Wine-sap tree by the road. Jeff loped up to her, panting with joy. I'd bought him from Art as a pup, and he considered Doris almost as much his mistress as he did me his master. She was the

only person except me he knew by name.

Doris saw me and hastily averted her red-rimmed eyes. I hungered to take her in my arms and comfort her, but instead I stood stiffly a few feet away and said formally: "Sorry to bother you, Doris, but I'm checking every angle on this case, and I'd like to ask you a few questions."

She threw me a quick glance, looked away again and said: "I can't imagine how I could be of help to you—but go ahead."

"This nudist camp in the woods," I said. "It's a new one on me. What do you know about it?"

She shrugged. "Nothing special. It was started a few months ago and quite a few people came out until recently. The last week I've just seen the woman who manages it and a young couple." Her voice was as cool and impersonal as if she were talking to a delivery boy she barely knew.

"Have either the woman or young couple been away from the camp recently?" I asked.

"I haven't seen the woman for several days," she said. "I saw the other two drive past in their coupe yesterday afternoon. They were headed toward the camp. I think they leave their car by the road and walk in from there."

"Just the man and girl—no one with them?" I asked.

"As far as I know," she said. "I noticed the girl especially. She wasn't wearing a hat and her hair was being blown all over."

I made a fumbling attempt to lighten the atmosphere.

"I just met the blonde," I said. "She's certainly attractive."

Doris gave me a scornful glance that made me squirm. But I had to try to draw her out of her shell some way. "She dolls herself up so," I went on,

"that you'd think she was trying to get a man, instead of having one. Do you know if the fellow is really her husband?"

She elevated her nose. "I haven't the faintest idea," she said. "If you are going in for nudists, it is wise to pick one with plenty of practice in putting on her face. Most of them look so leathery."

I was getting a rise, and I grinned inwardly.

"Well, she was mighty friendly," I said. "Offered to help me in any way she could."

Doris' eyes were frostier than ever. "You'd better go to her then," she said, shortly. "I'm sure you'll find her a great help." And, before I could answer, she ran lightly but swiftly toward the house.

I felt a little better as Jeff and I continued up the road.

LARRY STEARNS was awaiting me impatiently and he became even more glum when I told him I didn't have anything yet. I said I thought I'd look up the cabbie and he nodded for me to go ahead, acting as though he thought it didn't make much difference what I did.

I found the hacker at the address he'd given me. He was in a dingy apartment reading the funny papers, his shoes off and a dead cigar in his mouth. He greeted me casually. "Locate my dough yet?"

I shook my head and he grunted his disappointment. "I sure need it," he said.

I looked him over thoughtfully and had an idea. "Get your shoes on," I said. "I've got some suspects I want you to look over."

He looked startled. "No kidding," he said. "I'll be right with you."

Jeff sniffed at the hacker, then

hopped into the back seat and lay with his head on his paws watching our every gesture.

I drove up the old road to the quarry and parked the car. The cabbie gave no indication he'd ever been in that part of the world before and I said nothing of the truck in the quarry pool. We walked on toward the cottage.

Jeff saw a flicker of white and took it as a personal insult. He bounded into the underbrush after the rabbit. He knew we weren't after birds and it was all right for him to play.

I rapped on the front door of the cottage. There was a moment's silence before the blonde opened the door. Her eyes recognized me and then glanced quickly at the hacker.

I looked past her and saw a pile of canned food in a corner near the sink filled with dirty dishes. I asked if we could come in a minute.

Her eyes became watchful, but she said: "Why yes, I guess so. But what is it you want?"

I smiled at her pleasantly. It wasn't hard to do either. She was wearing slacks and, judging from the contour of her shirt front, nothing under them. "Just want to ask a few questions," I said.

She stepped aside and we went in. I sat down without waiting for an invitation. There was a pair of shoes in front of my chair and they were covered with chalk-colored dust. I stared at them and my stomach crawled toward my throat. I wished fervently I'd replaced the gun stolen from me at the quarry.

The girl looked at us questioningly. The cabbie smirked at her and spoke before I could stop him.

"The copper made a mistake, lady," he said. "He said he had some suspects for me to look at, but you sure

ain't one of them."

The blonde's face whitened under her artificial coloring. "Copper?" she whispered.

I tried to make my smile innocent. "Yeh," I said. "But the hacker's got it all wrong. The suspects I want him to see are further down the road. I just stopped here to ask if you'd seen anything suspicious recently."

It was a bum stall, but the best I could think up in a hurry. I only wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible—and get back with a gun. All the pieces had fallen into a pattern and I thought I knew all the answers.

"If there's nothing you can tell us," I continued. "We might as well be on our way."

The girl's face was expressionless, but I caught a look of sudden panic in the cabbie's eyes and swung my head around swiftly. It was too late. A crushing blow struck the base of my skull and I went out like a snuffed candle. My last conscious thought was to recall that there was a closet door just behind my chair.

I WAS sprawled out on the floor like a sack of wheat when I finally came to. The hacker was tied in a chair, his eyes wild with terror.

The blonde was expressing herself without reticence. "From now on, I do the thinking," she was telling the big guy, bitterly. "You and your safe hide-out in the woods! If we'd holed up in a nice apartment like I told you, no hill-billy cop would have stumbled onto us—and we'd been a hell of a lot more comfortable. Now we're in a swell jam. We got to knock off a couple more guys and find a new place to lay low."

I could sympathize with her annoyance. The idea of knocking off some more guys didn't appeal to me either.

The floor was hard and I tried to

ease my position, but they heard the slight sound I made. The girl got up with pantherish grace. Her sandals moved near me and I thought how I had always hated painted toenails on women.

I grabbed for her ankle, but I was still too foggy for good timing. All I got was a kick in the mouth from a hard heel.

The big guy grunted. "Take it easy, pal," he said, wearily. "We don't want to have to bother mussing you up first."

I didn't like the connotation of that "first," but I didn't say anything. There wasn't much I could say—or do either. I thought of Art Nelson with the back of his head shot off and was nauseated with helpless rage.

The hacker's forehead was wet. "Listen," he pleaded. "This guy don't mean nothing to me. Let me out of this. I know how to keep my trap closed."

They ignored him completely. The blonde glared at me and said: "How did a hick copper like you ever stumble onto our setup?"

I licked my bleeding lips where she'd kicked them and tried to grin. "That wasn't hard," I said. "You gave me a lead the first time I talked to you."

Her hard eyes looked me over balefully. "You're a liar," she said, contemptuously.

The big guy was staring at her speculatively and I wondered if I could get them quarreling among themselves. I'd heard a lot recently about this "divide and conquer" theory. I addressed him directly.

"Yes," I said, chattily. "The blonde sure spilled the beans."

"Keep talking," he ordered, curtly.

"Well," I said, "I got to thinking about the vague description of the bandit driver and it suddenly occurred to me that a big cap, goggles and long raincoat could easily be used to dis-

guise the fact a girl was involved—and start the cops looking for two men. Then when I found the truck near this shack—"

The blonde interrupted me with some lurid language and the big guy growled at her to shut up. Then he turned to me and said: "Okay, wise guy, you made some lucky guesses. Only they turned out unlucky for you."

He went on: "Yeh, we heisted that Stacy job and Blondie figured we'd throw the cops off by making it look like two guys did it. She thinks we should use more psychology in our work. That's what comes of reading a book." He looked at her with disgust, and she spit out a dirty expletive.

I TRIED to drag it out as much as possible, although we were buried so deep in the woods it looked like all the time in the world wouldn't do me any good. But I still had a chance to keep my promise to Doris and avenge Art as long as I was breathing. I wouldn't mind going so much if I could just take them with me.

"I had to put together a lot of little things," I told them. "The left side of Blondie's face was sunburned, like she'd been cruising at the driver's seat in a car—or truck. A circle around her eye was white, which could account for goggles. Then she's supposed to be in a nudists' camp and her cute legs are as pale as a whitewashed fence. Nudists are supposed to have a little tan on their hides."

The big guy's lips curled in a sardonic smile. "It's a shame to get rid of such a bright boy," he said. "We'll make it as painless as possible."

I continued hurriedly. "I began to get closer when I found you two had come out from town yesterday afternoon, yet the only fresh shoe marks coming this way past the creek were

of two men. Another hint the blonde was wearing men's stuff."

The big guy was getting impatient. "All right, all right," he said. "We admit you're smart. But what does it get you?" He pulled out a short-barreled revolver and hefted it. The cabbie moaned and passed out.

"Wait a minute," I said, trying to fight off panic myself. "Here's the two main things that tripped you. First, the blonde said you were a bird lover, yet you paid no attention when I made this call from the edge of the woods near you. Listen." I wet my lips and gave the imitation of the western meadowlark. I'd had an idea and was fighting for seconds now.

"Any bird lover," I went on, "would have been surprised to hear that call in these parts and would have investigated. That was my first good proof there was something phoney about you. Then the clincher came when I entered this room just now. Look!"

I pointed to the shoes covered with chalky dust. Both turned their eyes automatically and I explained: "Dry lime—stirred up from the pile spilled in front of the Stacy paymaster's shack. Whoever wore those shoes killed Art Nelson!"

That really got him. He spun around toward me and brought up the gun. The sights lined up with the bridge of my nose as steadily as if he was getting ready to knock down clay pipes in a shooting gallery.

"Wait a minute!" I yelled. "Do you lunkheads think I'd come here without being covered. Hell's fire, the place is surrounded!"

It was an old gag and I was afraid it wouldn't work.

It didn't.

The big guy looked bored. "You've been smart up to now," he said. "Why spoil your record?"

His finger started to tighten on the trigger and my throat constricted in sheer terror. Cold sweat broke out on my forehead and I tensed myself to take it going at him.

Then everyone froze to attention. In the breathless moment while we all awaited his shot, each of us heard a stealthy movement on the porch outside.

EVERYTHING happened at once. As he swung toward the door, I yelled: "Come and get 'em boys!" Then I dived head-first out the window. I was crashing through the glass before he could do more than snap a wild shot at my back. It only clipped my arm.

I rolled to my feet and ran frantically around the corner of the cottage. There I crouched, trembling and with blood streaming down my face from cuts in my forehead where I'd gone through the window. There was no time to get across the clearing into the woods without being shot down from behind. I grabbed up a heavy stick and waited.

The big guy knew I was unarmed. He jumped out the window and raced recklessly after me. I met him at the corner with a smashing blow on the head and he went down like an axed steer.

But the blonde had gone around the house the other way and was dispassionately drawing a bead on me with a heavy automatic when I turned to face her. It probably was the same gun that killed Art Nelson.

Then there was a flash of red through the air behind her and Jeff had her by the arm, hanging on grimly. I got there in no seconds flat and caught her on the side of the chin with a right hook. It was the first time I ever hit a woman. It felt swell.

I got them tied up with some rope from the cottage, but I was too busy to release the cabbie for the time being.

My arm was aching where the bullet had pinked me and my cut forehead hurt like fire as I sat down with all the guns to wait for the blonde and her boy friend to regain consciousness.

Jeff came up and licked my hand anxiously, eager to know if he had done right. I kissed him smack on the end of his cold, wet nose, and he grinned at me in huge satisfaction, his tongue lolling out a foot.

"The guy that made that 'man's best friend' crack certainly wasn't fooling," I told the setter. "But, boy, I sure was worried whether you were close enough to hear our meadowlark whistle when I needed someone to distract those thugs. When you crept up to that front door to see what the boss wanted, you weren't a second too soon."

The blonde woke up and started to curse me. I thought of Art Nelson and told her to keep still or I'd knock her teeth down her throat. And I wasn't fooling.

A gruff voice behind me said: "Drop the gun and put your hands behind your neck." The man sounded like he wasn't fooling, either.

I took a chance and looked around. It was the red-nosed Gant. He was aiming a big Luger at me.

I started to tell him off, but his wrist straightened and I hastily dropped my gun. I told Jeff to stand—I didn't want him shot.

"That's better," Gant said. Now maybe you can explain why you have assaulted my friends here."

"Listen," I told him in cold fury. "You're interfering with an officer making an arrest. I'll see you in the can for this."

He looked a little uncertain, but the Luger still pointed at my belt buckle.

The blonde was edging toward the gun I'd dropped and the big guy was stirring from his nap. Something had to be done—and quick!

It was done, but not by me.

A ROCK cracked Gant on the temple and he pitched forward to the ground. I got to the gun a split second before the blonde. She swore some more when I waved her back beside her boy friend.

Tige Davidson ambled out of the woods and said: "I guess the old peg can still mow 'em down at home plate, eh?"

I agreed with him, whole-heartedly.

He gave the blonde and her pal one curious glance and then calmly turned back to me. "I found Gant's truck back of the old Lewis barn," he informed me. "I stole all his guns and hid 'em. He was pretty mad when he found 'em gone. Then I trailed him here through the woods."

"Nice going," I said, "but why the hell did you steal my clothes at the quarry?"

His eyes fell. "Gosh, Pete," he said, sheepishly, "how'd you know it was me?"

"Jeff'd made a row if it wasn't a friend, and I couldn't figure any friend likely to be around there except you," I told him.

"Well, Pete," he explained, "I thought you was looking for me on account of what Gant said. And I couldn't afford to let you catch me until I got the goods on him. So I thought I'd slow you up a little."

I grinned at him. "Did you really have a bankroll at the pool room?" I asked.

He looked startled. "For gosh sakes, keep that quiet," he pleaded. "My wife'll slay me if she ever finds out I didn't quit playin' the ponies, like I

promised."

Gant started to stir around and I shot him questions about his truck and the guns Tige had spirited away. He broke down and admitted they were part of an arsenal he was collecting for his secret vigilante band. He swore they had nothing to do with the bandits.

The big guy interrupted us. "Hell, no," he sneered. "This crackpot never helped us any. He ran into me here in the woods the other day and wanted me to join some sort of a Ku Klux Klan. I kidded him along to get rid of him. Personally, I never needed any mob to back up my plays." He turned to the girl, sourly. "Particularly, it turns out, I didn't need any dumb blonde to ball things up for me."

The blonde spat at him.

I remembered the cabbie. I told Gant to beat it; I'd deal with him and his arsenal later. Tige held the guns on the bandits while I went inside and released the shaking hacker.

"Next time," I said, "you probably won't think it such a smart idea to report of phony holdup to gyp the company out of a few bucks."

He looked stunned and asked how I found that out.

"I didn't until you just admitted it," I said. "But I figured something of

the sort when I found you laying around your apartment doing nothing. If you'd really been robbed, you should have been out scrambling to make some more dough.

"At first I thought you were in with the bandits, but I finally picked up enough odds and ends to convince myself they worked alone."

Tige's voice came from the yard. "Hey, Pete, how long I got to hold this gun on these crooks? I got to get down town before the Racing Form is sold out."

"Just wait till I write a note," I told him.

I addressed it to Doris and asked her to phone for Larry Stearns and a couple more cops to come and get the bandits. I added a postscript saying I'd be over as soon as I got my wounds dressed. I knew that would have her softened up before I got there.

I stuck the note in Jeff's mouth. "Doris! Take it to Doris!" I commanded.

The dog looked at me approvingly. I'll swear he winked knowingly. Then he loped off through the woods, his ears flopping gaily.

Man's best friend?—you said it, brother.

THE END

UNTRUE—BUT WHY?

Can you detect the fallacy in these statements? Answers on page 301.

BANK robbers have raced out of town after looting the local bank. It was dark, and no one in the village can describe their car, other than to say it was a Buick. However, the state police find a man who says he saw the getaway car rush past him as he was walking into town; it was raining lightly, and the car tires left their imprint on the concrete for a couple minutes. The man describes the tread mark of each of the four tires. He had taken the trouble to notice the tread marks because the car went rushing past him so fast he suspected a crime had been done. The police are delighted: knowing that the getaway car is a Buick with certain distinct

tire marks is a great aid to identifying that getaway car.

* * *

A POLICE squad car is rolling down the street, and from its radio is blaring an account of the Yale-Harvard football game.

* * *

LEFTY O'MORIARTY, just out of San Quentin on parole, gets a job as cashier in a grocery. He buys a car, the next day; and on Sunday he drives his girl to Yuma and they get married. On their return, Detective Sergeant O'Reilly congratulates Lefty on his return to a decent, normal way of life.

"BILLY" AND THE "KIDS"

By LYNN STANDISH

EARLY in January, 1881, a secret agent was called in by the police to help apprehend William Burns, otherwise known as "English Billy," who had been shot while attempting, in company with another man then unknown, to pass counterfeit money in Stamford, Connecticut. A search of the New York hospitals was made and finally Burns was found in the surgical ward of Blackwell's Island. When he recovered the agent took him before the commissioner but the Stamford authorities failed to identify him. They were morally certain he was the man they wanted, but they could not give unqualified affirmative answers and the suspect was discharged.

However, another secret agent, Daniel McSweeney, was put on Burns' track when he left the courtroom and told to shadow the young man. McSweeney watched around for a day or two and learned that Burns seemed to be one of a gang of good-for-nothing men who made their headquarters around Chatham Square.

The secrets of such men, if they have any, can only be learned by slow, painstaking effort, and the fact that their companion, Burns, was a counterfeiter seemed to make it worth while to learn more about them. So McSweeney decided to go down, camp with this crowd and find out who they were and what they were doing. His idea was to get himself a room in a cheap lodging house, dress in old clothes, and gradually give them the impression that he was a crook and thereby uncover counterfeiters among them.

From that day on until the end of the case, Daniel McSweeney was to Chatham Square not Daniel McSweeney, United States Secret Service operator, but "Dan Dugan" living without visible means of support and presumably a criminal. He established himself in a fourth floor back bedroom in a lodging house that decent men never entered. He spent his days and nights in the places in which the gang stayed. He played pool with the pool players, cards with the card players and, so far as appearances were concerned, became as much of a loafer as any of them.

After he had bung around with them for three or four days he disappeared from their haunts for a day. When he returned to them he brought with him four or five watches. Some of the watches had an inch or two of chain hanging to them, the links having been snipped off in the peculiar manner that thieves know so well. The ring of another watch had been wrenched out, as pickpockets by a quick twist to remove the ring of a watch that they want to steal.

Between games of pool and at other appropriate times, McSweeney showed these watches to some of his friends. They looked both at McSweeney and the watches with interest. Here was a man who was buying stolen goods and

they often had stolen goods to sell. They could do business with this man. Within the next few days McSweeney bought many stolen articles from members of the gang, which he turned over to the authorities for identification.

As the relations between McSweeney and his new friends became more intimate remarks began to be made about counterfeit money. No one admitted that he had any to sell, but the conversation always hinted at the fact that if McSweeney, or "Dugan," as they called him wanted to deal in phoney money some of the gang could stock him up. McSweeney cleverly refused, saying it was too dangerous and not his line. This, of course, was only a buildup until the time he introduced a fixed letter from his supposed friend in New Orleans in which McSweeney was asked if he could not buy for him in New York \$600 worth of counterfeit silver dollars. As a result events moved rapidly from that time on. In a little while McSweeney had bought some counterfeit money from one member of the gang, Saunders, who he learned was a manufacturer of counterfeit coins. He also bought coins from Edward King, Charles Wilson, John Farrel, alias Jack Barrett, who was with Burns at Stamford the night Burns was shot. As rapidly as he could make the deals without exciting suspicion he also bought from Christopher McDonald, another manufacturer, and from Samuel Barker, Robert Nelly, James R. Hyde, James F. Murphy and David Angelo. William Burns also sold him a few pieces, and, after great effort, he succeeded in making purchases from Martin Leonard, saloon keeper and leader of the gang, and from Ann McCormack, Leonard's common law wife. McSweeney bought, marked and turned over to the authorities counterfeit money that he had bought from sixteen members of the gang.

The next thing was to arrest the men. If officers with warrants for the whole lot were sent out to scour Chatham Square not more than four or five could be picked up before the news of their capture would cause the rest to flee. So it became necessary to get them by ones and twos without letting any knowledge of their fate get out until the whole sixteen were in prison.

After much diligent and careful plotting all sixteen men, except Burns—"English Billy"—were apprehended, and then he too was finally taken into custody by McSweeney. Burns by that time was well aware of McSweeney's true profession and tried to escape when he met him on the street. McSweeney had yelled "Stop, thief!" and a big policeman, hearing the cries and seeing the fleeing Burns, swung his night stick on him and Burns dropped, nor did he get up until he was picked up. The entire sixteen having been arrested, their trial followed in due order.



Diana Bruce screamed. "He's been shot!"



Mystery of the **CRUSHED PEPPERMINTS**

By LEONARD RAPHAEL

**This murder smelled of peppermint, and
it was a sweet trail to a sour mystery**

"BUT, Steve," said Diana Bruce, making with the peaches-and-cream voice, "we're engaged."

"Sure," I said, "and already you're acting as if we were married. The point is that you're a movie star and I'm just a publicity agent. So it would be much better if you entered the theater with Van Edwards. He's your co-star in *Lovers Adrift*, and the public would eat it up."

Diana and I were sitting in her long

hunk of chauffeur-driven car, which was traveling rapidly towards the Star Theater, where the world premiere of *Lovers Adrift* was to be held. Diana looked like a blonde Hedy Lamarr, and she wore enough expensive ice about her throat to give her double pneumonia. In fact, she looked almost as good as I did.

The car finally stopped, and Diana dragged me out. The spotlights that accompany every major Hollywood pre-

view were lancing the evening sky in bright columns. The eager movie fans pressed against the ropes that kept them back from the path that led to the theater entrance.

Just by the entrance, a slick-haired announcer was interviewing all the celebrities over the public address system.

"Oh, that's Diana Bruce," said one excited voice loudly.

"Who's that guy with her?" asked another voice.

"Maybe it's Gene Autry."

I smiled modestly.

"Or his horse," said a wise guy.

I kept the smile on my kisser as if I hadn't heard. I didn't want to embarrass Diana. And at that moment, Van Edwards, the new matinee idol who had been a truck driver named Edwardski until a year ago, came up towards the microphone. Two women fainted as he passed them.

Louella Parsons jotted this item down in her little notebook. That fainting gag was costing my studio, Perfection Pictures, fifty bucks a head, but it was worth every cent.

"Hello, my dear friends," Van Edwards said.

From the applause that followed this statement, you would have thought he had just delivered the Gettysburg Address. Edwards seemed a little nervous. He raised his hands for silence, and opened his mouth to say something—but nothing came out.

He stood there, a surprised expression on his face, his lips twitching; and as I saw the blackish hole in his shirt-front spout blood, I jumped forward and grabbed him!

"Is there a doctor present?" yelled the slick-haired announcer.

I ignored him as I deposited the late Mr. Edwards on the sidewalk. I spotted Sergeant Hansen, head of the police detail which kept the public from get-

ting too close to the movie stars.

"Hansen," I rasped into the microphone, "this is in your department."

Sergeant Hansen came tearing up to the microphone as fast as that much beef could.

"Murder," I told him briefly.

"Now, listen," Hansen roared into the microphone with his usual lack of brains, "there's been a murder! Nobody leaves this place until I give the word."

Since there were a couple of thousand people packed around the theater, and only about thirty cops, this matter presented some difficulties. However, I was too busy comforting Diana Bruce to worry about that.

A couple of women in the crowd began to scream, a cop shoved a husky man too hard, and the free-for-all was going full blast inside of a minute more. Hansen dispatched a man to phone for reinforcements, and stood angrily by the body, glaring at the milling throng.

"Come on, Diana," I said, "we're getting out of this. There'll be no preview tonight."

"Now, wait a minute," said Hansen, "how do I know you didn't knock off Van Edwards? You were here when the murder took place."

"Yeah," I said, "and so were you."

BY now the police had what was left of the crowd under control. But the crowd had melted down to less than a hundred people, and it was a safe bet that a man smart enough to use a gun with a silencer would be smart enough to have escaped.

I got Diana back into the car, and told the chauffeur to take her home. Then I went back to brave the beefy Hansen. But he no longer desired my company.

"You go on home," said Hansen. "Ever since the Gilteen case, you've been walking around like William

Powell."

"Okay," I said, "but Van Edwards was under contract to Perfection Pictures, and that gives me a right to demand that you solve this case in a hurry."

"All right, you've demanded it," said Hansen. "Now go chase a blonde."

Then he began to curse everybody in the vicinity in language that even a cop should be arrested for using. Being a bright boy for my age, I hurriedly took a taxi out to Diana Bruce's junior palace.

"Miss Bruce in?" I asked the butler.

He seemed puzzled.

"No sir. I thought she was still with you. But there is this message for you, sir."

I tore open the envelope he handed me. Inside was a slip of paper with a roughly penciled message.

"Miss Bruce is on an enforced vacation. If you take a vacation from snooping, she will be allowed to return in a short time. If not, she will be returned to you."

The writer of the note had a very gruesome sense of humor.

"Who delivered this?" I asked.

"I don't know, sir. I found it in the letter box a few moments ago."

My beautiful brain swung into high gear. If I told the police about this, the kidnaper would undoubtedly consider that snooping. Diana's disappearance had to be kept quiet.

"Listen," I said to the butler, "if anyone wants to know, Miss Bruce is confined to her room under doctor's orders."

"I understand, sir."

The phone rang. It turned out to be Hansen, who had concluded that I had taken his advice about chasing that blonde.

"Somebody here who claims he's Diana Bruce's chauffeur," rasped Han-

sen's voice. Says his car has been stolen. What about it?"

"Just a gag I thought up," I lied. "Tell the chauffeur to come on home and forget it."

"Okay," said Hansen, and added as if it hurt him to do so, "Would you like to give me a hand with this case?"

"Sorry," I said, "but I'm not touching it. And you might let it get around that I refuse to cooperate with you."

"Am I old enough to know why?" he asked.

"You may be in about two weeks," I told him. "But for now, all you'll get from me is silence."

I hung up.

I kicked myself mentally in the pants for not having taken a closer look at the chauffeur in the car Diana entered. That murderer had planned everything in advance. Then I began to do my brilliant best to think of a reason for killing Van Edwards. Women had loved Edwards. Which was why most men had hated him. Despite a few phoney studio romances with various female stars, I knew that Edwards had only one real flame. She was Brenda Hayworth, a Beverly Hills society dame whose blood was so blue that some people claimed that ink came out when she cut herself.

SO I put on a clean handkerchief, and went to the Hayworth residence. I stood in the darkened doorway, and shoved a Perfection Pictures pass badge at the butler who answered the door.

"Sergeant Hansen," I barked, thrusting him aside officiously, and keeping my hat on as I entered.

Since that was the way all cops acted in the movies, the butler was convinced.

"I . . . uh . . ." he stammered.

I frowned at him with my good eyebrow.

"Miss Hayworth, is she here " I

snapped.

He looked too frightened to answer. Brenda Hayworth saved him the trouble by floating into the room herself.

"Miss Hayworth," I said, "I'm from the police department, and I'm here about the Van Edwards murder."

"Van . . . dead?"

She gave a little moan, and flopped onto a convenient couch. I wanted to get her to talk before she recovered enough from her surprise to start cooking up any lies.

Before I had a chance to do anything, in stalked her old man, J. J. Hayworth. He had more green stuff than a Texas ranch, so I had to be careful to behave.

"Young man, what do you mean by bursting into my house this way?"

"I'm an officer of the law," I said.

"And where is your search warrant?" he asked, his gray eyes boring coldly into mine.

I fumbled weakly in my pocket. The gesture was futile.

"And your badge?" he demanded.

I didn't know whether to feel relieved or not when Sergeant Hansen came in at that moment. He had a young guy with him. Very young. When the stranger saw Brenda Hayworth staring frightenedly at me, he was young and dumb enough to try to take a poke at me.

A few seconds later, while they were using smelling salts on both Brenda and the young guy, I ducked out. I had a feeling I was going to be pretty unpopular in the next few minutes.

I walked along, worrying about my Diana Bruce, the young actress who had made the men of America thank God for the invention of the sweater. And until I had come along, she had been the sort of dame who might try to have paint arrested for being fresh.

I WAS concentrating so much on her, that I didn't notice the black car which had come rolling slowly up the street. But I snapped out of it in a hurry and broke into a frantic run as the rear door of the car swung open. I had a hasty glimpse of a guy pointing a tommy-gun at me.

He cut loose just as I dived into the open doorway of a store. The chatteringly sinister machine-gun sent a blast of lead whinning over my head, missing me by very short inches.

I began to think that that guy with the tommy-gun didn't like me. I scrambled shakily to my feet as the car zipped away at top speed. Max Goldklein, the candy store proprietor, peeked cautiously up from behind a jar of lemon drops.

"Stevie, it's over, yes?"

"Yeah," I said.

Goldklein looked at me with a worried expression on his fat face. Aside from being tighter than two Scotchmen in an undersized girdle, he wasn't a bad guy.

"Steve Sanders, you'll get yourself killed playing around with those tough gun-machiners."

"Machine-gunners," I corrected him, "and that guy was very definitely not playing."

"You want I should call the police?" he asked.

"Nope. This is strictly a private bridge-party. But you know this district, Max. If a guy wanted to hide out with a long, black car, and maybe a pal or two, where would he do it?"

"About a mile down, there's an old house," said Goldklein. "Tramps sleep in it during cold days, when they have to find a warm place."

"What's wrong with it during the summer?" I asked.

"Well, it's the kind of a house that you don't like to live in, or even visit,

unless you have to," said Goldklein.

"Me, I have to," I told him. "Got a gun?"

Goldklein got his gun from the cash register drawer.

"Be careful, Steve," he said. And I was deeply touched until he added: "That gun cost me thirty bucks only a month ago."

I shoved the gun in my pocket, and walked down toward where he said the deserted house would be. This time I kept my eyes open for passing cars.

There weren't many cars out this late in this part of town, and the few that did pass me weren't equipped with built-in gunmen. I approached the big, dark house, and as I put my hand on the creaky gate I knew I was being watched.

Now listen! I know that there isn't any "sixth sense," and I quit believing in ghosts and Santa Claus at the same time . . . but as I stood in the lonely darkness before the old house, I felt hidden eyes staring at me, and no amount of reasoning could make me believe I was wrong. So I walked up the worn path slowly, with my hand on the gun in my pocket and my heart setting a new speed record.

I put a hand on the door—and stopped. I had a feeling that there was someone waiting for me on the other side of that door, someone who felt very strongly that it was about time I got something out of my life insurance policy. So I stepped lightly around to a window, and crawled inside.

IT WAS darker than a coal mine during a blackout. I drew my gun. This house was equipped with everything but ghosts, and I was preparing to give it one or two of those. At that moment, my future ghost coughed slightly and I took a pot shot at him and threw my-

self to the floor. There was a very comforting yowl of pain, and an answering blast of gun-fire that hit the thick wooden wall and nothing else.

I took one more shot, but I apparently missed this time. I tried another, and there was a groan and a dull thud. I crept cautiously forward, and, reaching out, felt a man's body. Then something struck me a glancing blow on the side of the head, and then once again . . . and a police whistle blew shrilly . . . and somebody lifted a man's body from beside me . . . and there was a peculiar smell of mint . . . and . . .

"SANDERS!" bellowed a foghorn, and I managed to force my eyelids open, and realized that the foghorn was really Sergeant Hansen trying to sound gentle.

"Get um?" I mumbled thickly.

"No, they both got away. That store owner got worried and phoned us to hurry out here. I thought you were steering clear of this case."

"That's what you were supposed to think."

I told him about Diana being kidnaped.

"Then we'll have to work fast," said Hansen. "Now the kidnaper knows you didn't take his advice. Got any clues?"

"None," I admitted, "except for the fact that one of those guys had a strong mint odor about him."

"Fine," Hansen said with heavy sarcasm, "now all we have to do is go around smelling people."

"What about going back and asking Brenda Hayworth a few questions?"

"After that beautiful start you made, I wouldn't advise it," said Hansen. "That young guy, Tommy Vale, is still out for your scalp."

"Well, suppose you start going after his. He may be our man."

"I don't think so," said Hansen. "He seems too much of a kid."

"Could be an act," I told Hansen.

An officer appeared at the door, half-dragging the subject of our conversation along.

Tommy Vale looked very frightened.

"I found him snooping around outside," said the cop.

"I was just passing by," protested Tommy Vale.

"Do you usually go for long walks in the middle of the night?" I asked. "And what do you happen to be doing in the slum district?"

Vale said nothing.

"Got a gun?" asked Hansen.

"I already searched him," said the cop. "He's clean."

"Wait a minute," I said. "You didn't by any chance find any peppermint candy on him, did you?"

"Yeah," said the cop, "a big bag of chocolate peppermints."

"So what?" asked Hansen. "You can't expect me to arrest a guy for eating candy peppermints."

"No," I said, "but I can expect you to get suspicious when a guy who was very jealous of Van Edwards turns up a couple of minutes after I've been slugged by the Edwards killer. And to top it all off, he just happens to be carrying some peppermint candy, and the guy who slugged me smelled strongly of mint."

"That's only circumstantial evidence," said Vale.

"It's enough to land you behind bars until we can get more," said Hansen.

"And things will be a lot easier all around, if you'll tell us where you've hidden Diana Bruce," I snapped.

"You mean she's been kidnaped?" asked Vale.

"You'd know more about that than we would," I said.

VALE began to look very worried. He was in a spot, and he knew it.

"I'll make a bargain with you. You promise not to arrest me, and I'll do my best to see that Diana Bruce isn't hurt."

"So you admit you've kidnaped her?"

"I do not," said Vale quickly. "But I may be able to prevent the person who did from injuring her."

"Suppose you give us the person's name, and let us do the preventing," said Hansen.

Vale shook his head.

"Okay, it's a deal," I said.

With Diana's safety at stake, I couldn't afford to say no.

"Wait a minute," said Hansen. "I'm running this case, and I say that he's under arrest."

"Sarge," I said, "do you want me to help you on this case, or do you want it to remain unsolved?"

Hansen looked thoughtfully at me for a moment.

"Okay, Sanders, he can go."

Tony Vale slipped hastily out.

"Don't have him followed," I told Hansen. "I have a hunch he was telling the truth, and I don't want to take any chances when Diana is involved."

"And what is the police department of this city supposed to do while you're worrying about your sweetheart?"

"You might try looking for a stray corpse. I think I finished that guy in the dark."

A breathless cop suddenly appeared to confirm what I had just said.

"Sarge, they found a dead guy in a black car about two miles from here, and they think the dead guy is Frankie DiGonello."

Hansen whistled in surprise. DiGonello was almost as famous a gangster as Edward G. Robinson. Only DiGonello never acted on the screen.

"That would be the boy who took a few blasts at me," I said. "He was in very bad form tonight."

"Now if we can just find out who hired him," said Hansen.

"Sure," I cracked, "all we have to do is third degree his corpse."

"Don't be funny. All this points to little Tommy Vale again. He could afford to pay the kind of money DiGonello would ask for."

"Yeah," I said, "and after driving a corpse two miles away, he hurried back so the police could catch him near this house."

"Maybe he forgot something," said Hansen.

"If he had, he wouldn't have been dumb enough to choose a time like this to pick it up. I suggest we go back to the Hayworth dump."

"Why?" asked Hansen.

"Well," I said, not wanting to give the real reason, "if we don't get anywhere there, we can at least have a good time staring at Brenda."

AND after having been in the Hayworth place for almost an hour, that was about all we were doing. Brenda, however, wasn't looking as pretty as usual. Her eyes were red-rimmed. J. J. Hayworth wasn't in a happy mood either. He kept gnawing his moustache, and gave you a feeling that only his gentlemanly training kept him from telling you to go to hell.

"Miss Hayworth," said Hansen for the seventh time, "we're only trying to help you. Don't you want us to find the man who killed Van Edwards?"

She looked wildly at Hansen.

"No, I don't. I loved Van, but I don't care whether they find the man who killed him or not. Punishing the killer wouldn't bring Van back, and it might . . ."

She stopped as though afraid she had already said too much.

"And it might get Tommy Vale the electric chair," Hansen finished for her.

"I didn't say that," she blurted.

"But it's what you were about to say," Hansen rasped.

"See here," interrupted J. J. Hayworth, "I think my daughter's had about enough for the night."

"Just a parting thought," said Hansen as we rose to go. "We have enough evidence on Tommy Vale now to put him behind bars; and if you won't co-operate with us, Miss Hayworth, that's exactly what we'll have to do."

"You can't arrest Vale," I protested as we walked outside. "That'll endanger Diana's life."

"I'm through being a kind Boy Scout," barked Hansen. "This is a murder case, not a sewing circle. I'll have Vale behind bars inside of twenty-four hours."

Just then a detective came up and whispered something in Hansen's clean ear. Hansen looked a little sick.

"Tommy Vale's just committed suicide."

I whistled.

"Don't tell me you're falling for that, Sarge."

"They found him with a gun in his hand," snapped Hansen. "What do you expect me to believe?"

"Look," I said, "he was going after the murderer to stop him from injuring Diana Bruce. Maybe he threatened to expose the murderer. So what happens? He gets killed, and the real killer frames it to look like a suicide. Besides, where does that leave Diana Bruce?"

"Miss Bruce is safe," spoke up the detective who had brought the news. "She was returned to her place about an hour ago. She's a little shaken up, but otherwise okay."

"Why doesn't someone tell me these things?" roared Hansen. "Want to see the dame, Sanders?"

I thought fast, and decided to play

a hunch.

"Nope," I said, "I want to see the corpse."

The corpse looked almost as repulsive as Hansen. A guy with his brains blown out looks very messy.

"Perfect solution," said Hansen. "Conscience troubled him, so he decided to end it all."

"It's too perfect," I said.

I reached gingerly into the dead man's pocket and came out with a bag of crushed peppermints.

"He even got some of that candy on his coat," said Hansen.

I saw a whitish, sticky smear on Vale's coat shoulder. I poked my finger into it.

"Satisfied?" asked Hansen, eyeing me scornfully.

"Just about," I said, starting to walk away.

"Where're you going?" asked Hansen.

"Me?" I said. "I've got a date with a murderer!"

AS I waited there for him in the silence of the old house, I began to get nervous. I could be wrong. After all it was only a hunch. Maybe Tommy Vale *had* committed suicide.

After leaving Hansen, I had made a little phone call, inviting the murderer down to this house. He would come, I knew because I was the only one who even guessed his identity. I didn't have enough on him to send him to the chair, but I doubted if he realized that. A man who has committed murder doesn't remain coldly logical very long.

My gun was out, and I crouched beside the door in the darkness. Then suddenly I went cold all over. For directly behind me was a strong smell of mint. And even as I started to move, a cold, hard circle of metal pressed against the back of my neck, and a

hand gently took my gun. In a spot like this, I knew enough to be good.

The man with the gun chuckled.

"Good evening," he said politely.

"Good evening, Mr. Hayworth," I said, "I didn't expect you quite so soon. Or from behind."

Hayworth only laughed.

"You're a very clever young man. And in a few moments you're going to be a very dead young man. Just as a matter of curiosity, I'd like to know how I gave myself away."

"Your toupee," I explained.

He didn't get it.

"I admit I wear a wig, but that wouldn't give me away."

"It wouldn't have, except for the fact that you use theatrical spirit gum to keep the toupee on. That spirit gum has a very strong mint odor. Even so, it isn't noticeable enough to attract attention unless you're standing very close to a person. And as you bent over to pick DiGonello up, after slugging me, you were very close. Then, when I returned to your house for the second time, I was very careful to get close enough to see if you were wearing a wig."

"Why didn't you have me arrested there?" asked Hayworth.

FIRST, there wasn't enough evidence. Second, you still had Diana—or at least I thought you still had her, and I didn't want to endanger her further. The fact that Tommy Vale happened to be fond of peppermint candy threw me off the track for a little while. But I found a smear of spirit gum on his coat, and things began to make sense. I remembered that that car with DiGonello had come along a short time after I left your house. And you and your daughter were the only ones who knew what I had come to your home for. Vale wouldn't have had time

to recover from my punch and then have sent DiGonello after me."

"And did you also discover how I killed Tommy Vale?" asked Hayworth.

"That was fairly simple. He came on you while you were adjusting your toupee. That accounts for the smear of spirit gum on his coat. You shot him, and then took the body to a vacant lot and left it there. The lot wasn't far from your home, so you had time to return Diana Bruce, and get back to be at your home when Sergeant Hansen and I arrived."

"Which accounts for Sergeant Hansen obligingly concluding that Tommy Vale returned Miss Bruce—who, incidentally, was blindfolded during her period of captivity and so never caught a glimpse of me—and then killed himself in a fit of remorse. You seem," said Hayworth, "to have accounted for everything but the original killing of Van Edwards. What motive could I possibly have for disposing of him?"

"Simple. You didn't want him to marry your daughter Brenda, because he was only an ex-truck driver, and not good enough for one of the Beverly Hills Hayworths. You tried to get Tommy Vale to do the shooting for you, but he didn't have the nerve. You wanted Brenda to marry Tommy, so you knew he would keep quiet about the murder in order to keep from injuring the father of the woman he loved. But you went too far when you threatened to kill Diana. You had hired DiGonello to kill me, because you didn't want to risk a fight with me yourself. You even let DiGonello get a couple of slugs of lead before stepping in yourself. Then you had to in order to keep the police from finding you here."

"So you know everything," said Hayworth. "Well, if it will give you any satisfaction, I admit you've been right. I *did* kill Vale and Edwards. I even

finished off Frankie DiGonello in order to eliminate the risk of taking him to a doctor. So everything is yours, Mr. Sanders, everything but the final hand, and that is the one that counts."

"Will I be another suicide?" I asked.

"Oh, no," said Hayworth. "Merely an auto accident. I shall simply knock you unconscious, and then run over you with a stolen car. Hit-and-run driving, an accident which could easily happen on a night like this."

"You forget that I have already told Sergeant Hansen you are the killer," I bluffed.

Hayworth chuckled.

"I can't blame you for trying, but the sergeant was kind enough to phone and tell me the case was closed. His call came a moment before yours. He did say that you claimed Tommy Vale had not committed suicide, but I don't believe the sergeant has enough imagination to tie that up with your death from an auto accident."

"You know," drawled a familiar voice, "you shouldn't talk about people behind their backs. It's impolite.

As Hayworth started in surprise, I let loose a right that sent him floating into Sergeant Hansen's waiting arms.

"I had a hunch too," said Hansen as they put the handcuffs on the unconscious Hayworth. "Thought you might come along here, and I had a few ideas about Hayworth myself. I phoned him that the case was closed in order to put him off guard. And don't worry about evidence. The boys rigged up a dictaphone before either you or Hayworth got here."

Hayworth had recovered consciousness by now, and was listening to Hansen with a very sickly expression on his face. He didn't look at all dignified. But when Diana Bruce came charging in, he rose and managed a very neat bow.

She ignored him, and draped herself around my willing neck.

"Darling, are you all right?"

I was about to tell her not to be such a ham, when she kissed me. And after that I could only manage a weak nod.

"Sanders," said Sergeant Hansen, grinning at us, "would you like to come down to that station and help me wind things up?"

But at the moment I was much too busy to let him know.

OUR INGENIOUS POSTAL INSPECTORS

By JAMES NELSON

THE average American citizen believes the only federal law enforcement agency is the F.B.I. But there are many other such agencies and one of the most important is the Postal Inspection Service. These inspectors go after all post office robberies, large and small.

In the investigation of mail losses by a company or individual, the search is speedily limited to the two most likely sources—the delivering post office and the place of delivery. In the case of a firm with a large mailroom force, inspectors sometimes find that one of the company's own employees is guilty. If, however, they find that this is not the case, they immediately turn to the post office.

From secret lookouts, to which they alone have access, and which they can usually enter without going through the post office, they survey the workroom. They then interview the officials and collect information on every employee. This is all done systematically and secretly.

Peculiar habits of employees may help solve a case. For instance, a certain clerk who had often been reported to the Postmaster for failing to meet obligations and was known to be continually "broke" suddenly started carrying a great deal of money, lending it to others, etc. He also bought an expensive new car. Inspectors, investigating losses of letters containing cash remittances, learned of the clerk's new mode of living and they began to watch him. They soon discovered he was the culprit. From concealed peepholes they kept tab on his methods. With apparent carelessness he let a pile of letters accumulate on his work table. These letters were all addressed to the same firm. When he was sure no one was around, he removed his sweater, threw it on the pile of letters, opened the drawer in front of him and swept letters and sweater into the drawer. Later when he thought no one was looking, he gathered up the sweater, letters and all concealed within its folds, and went to the toilet. In the privacy behind the locked doors of a hooth, he opened the letters, removed the money and flushed the evidence down the drain.

It was a perfect set-up and the only way to trap him was with marked money. In the presence of witnesses, marked money was placed in a number of decoy letters. Later they were placed

where the suspected clerk would handle them. He took most of them, removed the money and destroyed the letters. When accosted by postal inspectors, he readily showed them his wallet and got the surprise of his life—marked money—something that had never occurred to him.

A greater problem to the inspectors is the robbery of a train, mail truck, or postal station. An example of the persistence of mail inspectors is the solution of the Siskiyou Tunnel hold-up in Oregon. Four men were killed and the train dynamited. Unintentionally on the part of the bandits the mail car and its contents were blown up. The bandits escaped and the mail inspectors were confronted with one of the greatest mysteries of all times. Few clues were found, the most valuable of which was a pair of overalls left near the scene of the explosion. The mail sleuths began a manhunt which lasted five years. The three bandits are now serving life sentences.

The postal investigators sent the overalls to an Oregon professor, who was able to determine the following: The man who had worn the overalls was a lumberjack; he was five feet, eight, heavy set and had brown hair; he was not over twenty-five years old; he had recently worked in lumber camps in Washington or Oregon where fir trees were cut—more recently having occupied a cattleman's cabin; his name was de Autremont or he knew someone by that name; he was left-handed; he was fastidious.

Here's how these facts were uncovered—He was believed to be a lumberjack because a little spot on the overalls was found to be sap from a fir tree. This meant he had worked in a camp where fir trees were cut—Oregon or Washington. He was undoubtedly left-handed because the left shoulder strap was worn, showing he had removed the overalls with his left hand.

Two single hairs caught in a clasp showed brown under the microscope. Analysis of the hair further established his age. He was presumed to have occupied a cattleman's cabin because rock salt, such as cattlemen use, was found in a pocket. Fingernail parings were found in another pocket indicating that he was fastidious.

A tiny ball of paper which had been pressed into the bottom of the pencil pocket of the overalls was straightened out, chemically treated and

examined under a microscope. It proved to be a receipt for a registered letter signed by a de Autremont.

Post office records showed that a registered letter had been received at a nearby post office by one Roy de Autremont. In the meantime the cabin had been found less than five miles from the tunnel. It offered more clues. Chemical analysis of a towel showed that it had been used on three faces. A charred box, not completely destroyed, bore part of an express label, showing the box had been shipped to de Autremont from Lakewood, New Mexico.

Other facts were established when the inspectors shifted the investigation to Lakewood. The bandits were identified as three brothers. Pictures and descriptions were secured, and printed on a circular. The brothers were barbers by trade and circulars went to barber shops all over America. They had also worked as lumberjacks and all camps were notified.

Two million circulars were sent all over the world. Descriptions were broadcast by radio. The search went on relentlessly for four years before the first man was picked up in the army in the Philippines. The other two brothers were arrested a few months later. They all confessed.

Several years back there was an alarming amount of postal burglaries. Investigation disclosed the existence of a gang organized to burglarize post offices. Not a detail had been missed, even to the creation of marketing outlets for postage stamps. They were responsible for 81 post office robberies in the middle west. Evidence dug up by the inspectors revealed that the ring consisted of fifteen members, including the vice-president of a Denver bank. This ring was responsible for numerous other robberies—banks, railroad stations, and even courthouses.

In large cities, the theft of letters from mailboxes in apartment houses offers a serious problem. The money loss is small, but thousands of relief, dividend and veterans' checks have been stolen and successfully forged.

One man was trailed in 41 states and when convicted, admitted he had worked in every city in the country of more than 50,000 population. He only stole hills and statements. With a cleverly forged worthless check, he would go to a business house, get the check cashed, pay the bill, and come away with the balance in cash. In this way, he obtained \$38,000 in 28 months. When he was arrested he had in his possession 116 stolen letters and check books on banks in 33 cities.

Unscrupulous persons formulate illegal money-making schemes through the mails every year in the United States. When they are discovered, the Postmaster General orders mail addressed to them returned, marked "fraudulent". It is the job of postal inspectors to gather evidence to enable the Postmaster General decide these questions. The evidence is used by the U. S. Attorney in

the prosecution of the accused.

A certain group, promoting fraudulent stock, fooled the public to the tune of ten million dollars. Inspectors worked on this case for more than eight months. In their unobtrusive way, they examined voluminous records and accounts, analyzed corporate setups, interviewed many witnesses. When they finally closed in, fifty persons were indicted.

George Joseph Shepard copied portraits so expertly that he was able to pass them off as the work of famous artists. He was arrested and convicted when he tried to sell Richard F. Cleveland, son of President Grover Cleveland, a portrait of his father, supposedly painted by the artist Peale.

In Floyd County, Kentucky, relief officials tried a mail fraud that would have made them all independently wealthy if it had succeeded. They withheld relief orders, forged the names of clients, turned the orders over to certain merchants, who sent them to the State Administrator. Checks were sent to the merchants who split with the relief officials. Postal inspectors, working secretly through the mail service, traced the conspirators. Twenty-two persons were convicted, including the county judge and the mayor of the county seat.

Not so many years back, two big rings for producing and circulating counterfeit sweepstakes tickets were tracked down and broken by postal inspectors. One gang operating out of Kansas City had collected at least \$28,000,000 from victims in the United States. Nine men were convicted. A similar fraud in New York was stopped by the postal investigators. Twenty-six men were indicted.

Ordinarily, the loss of such a small amount as \$13.95 is a negligible one; but not to the Postal Inspection Service. In the little town of Londonderry, New Hampshire, the postmaster left that small amount of cash in the post office overnight. The office had been entered and the money was stolen. Only one clue was found, but that was sufficient. The burglar had left one-fourth of a thumb print on a broken pane of glass.

One fellow in Pennsylvania swindled stamp-collectors by cleverly counterfeiting provincial postmarking stamps on aged envelopes. Nobody but an expert could detect the difference. However, the postal inspectors got their man and seized his equipment, consisting of a large quantity of dies, old paper, coloring charts, inks, prepared stamps, and postmarking stamps.

Postal inspectors make no arrest until convinced they have the right man. They seldom engage in shooting, although they often deal with dangerous criminals. They never set a trap for a suspect unless they are certain he is guilty. And when they set a trap they are reasonably sure he will walk into it. They work quietly, simply, and seldom resort to violence. The third degree is not used by them and the suspect is always given full benefit of his constitutional rights.

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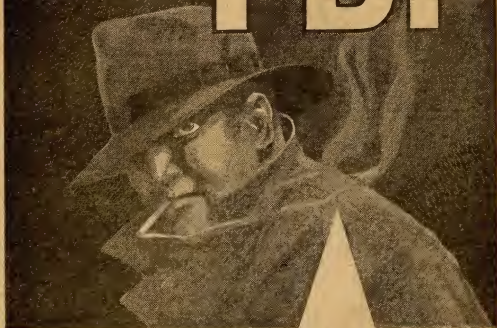
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Acting in cooperation with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Mammoth Detective presents the following line-up of wanted criminals. If you have a clue that might result in their capture, notify your local FBI office or Mammoth Detective at once.



ESCAPED FEDERAL PRISONER

WANTED

TOMAS CERVERA, with aliases: **TOMAS AGUIERO**, **TOMAS AGUIERO**, **TOM CAVERO**, **TOMAS CERVECERA**, **TOMAS CERVERA**, **TOMAS CERVERA**, **TOMAS CERVERA**, **L. CHACON**, **BENITO DURAN**, **JUAN GARCIA**, **TOMAS GUERRERO**, **TOMAS GUERRERO**, **TOMAS GUERRERO**, **TOMAS GUERRERO**, **ALBERTO LOPEZ**, **JOE ROMERO**, **JOSE ROMERO**.

DESCRIPTION

Age, 43 years (born March 7, 1899, at Leon, Guanajuato, Mexico); Height, 5 feet, 4 inches; Weight, 150 pounds; Eyes, brown; Hair, black; Complexion, olive; Build, medium; Race, Mexican; Nationality, Mexican; Occupations, laborer, barber; Scars and marks, cut scars left and right wrists, large thick cut scar at hairline back of neck, left, pit scar left cheek.

CRIMINAL RECORD

* As Tom Cervera, No. —, arrested Police Department, Cheyenne, Wyoming, April 15, 1917; charge, burglary; disposition, released to Sheriff's Office, Cheyenne, Wyoming, April 15, 1917.
* As Thomas Cervera, No. —, arrested Sheriff's Office, Cheyenne, Wyoming, April 15, 1917; charge, burglary; disposition, 2 to 5 years.
* As Thomas Cervera, No. 2497, received State Penitentiary, Hawlin, Wyoming, April 30, 1917; crime, burglary; sentence, 2 to 5 years; discharged March 26, 1920.
* As Jose Romero, No. 1923, arrested Sheriff's Office, Santa Ana, California, April 18, 1921; charge, trespassing; disposition, 30 days County Jail.
* As Thomas Cervera, No. —, arrested Sheriff's Office, Tucson, Arizona, January 16, 1924; charge, burglary (2nd degree); disposition, 2 to 3 years.
* As Thomas Cervera, No. 6319, received State Penitentiary, Florence, Arizona, February 3, 1924; crime, burglary (2nd degree); sentence, 2 to 3 years; paroled January 30, 1926.
* As Thomas Cervera, No. 38731, arrested Police Department, Reno, Nevada, December 23, 1927; charge, burglary (2nd degree); disposition, 3 to 5 years.
* As Thomas Cervera, No. 2547, received State Penitentiary Carson City, Nevada, January 12, 1928; crime, burglary (2nd degree); sentence, 3 to 5 years; discharged March 10, 1931.
* As Thomas Guerrero, No. 17590, arrested Police Department, Sacramento, California, August 24, 1935; charge, vagrancy; disposition, 60 days County Jail.
* As Thomas Cervera, No. —, arrested U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, San Francisco, California, September 25, 1935; charge, violation immigration laws; disposition, deported to Mexico November 18, 1935.
* As Thomas Cervera, No. 17590, arrested Police Department, Sacramento, California, April 8, 1937; charge, vagrancy and en route to U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service for deportation; disposition, 30 days County Jail; released to immigration authorities May 8, 1937.
* As Thomas Cervera, No. —, arrested U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, San Francisco, California, May 8, 1937; charge, violation immigration laws; disposition, deported to Mexico June 25, 1937.
* As Thomas Cervera, No. 5032132, arrested U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, El Paso, Texas, July 18, 1937; charge, violation immigration laws; disposition, released to U. S. Marshal, Tucson, Arizona, July 17, 1937.
* As Thomas Cervera, No. 1854, arrested U. S. Marshal, Tucson, Arizona, July 17, 1937; charge, unlawful entry into U. S.; disposition, 18 months.
* As Thomas Cervera, No. 13046, received U. S. Penitentiary, McNeil Island, Washington, September 4, 1937; crime, violation Immigration Act; sentence, 18 months; conditionally released, November 7, 1938.
* As Thomas Cervera, No. —, arrested U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, San Francisco, California, December 12, 1938; charge, violation immigration laws; disposition, deported, December 14, 1938.
* As Thomas Cervera, No. —, arrested Police Department, Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, December 23, 1938; charge, vagrancy; disposition, fined 12 pesos (or 7 days).
* As Thomas Cervera, No. 4020, arrested U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, Tucson, Arizona, December 23, 1938; charge, violation immigration laws; disposition, released to U. S. Marshal, Santa Fe, New Mexico.
* As Thomas Cervera, No. 4020, arrested U. S. Marshal, Santa Fe, New Mexico, December 23, 1938; charge, violation immigration laws; disposition, 4 months.
* As Thomas Cervera, No. 11149, received Federal Correctional Institution, La Tuna, Texas, February 15, 1939; crime, violation immigration laws; sentence, 4 months.
* As Thomas Cervera, No. 11649, recommitted Federal Correctional Institution, La Tuna, Texas, June 16, 1939; charge, violation immigration laws (conditional release violator); sentence, 103 days on old sentence of 18 months; discharged, October 1, 1939.
* Represents notation unsupported by fingerprints.

MURDER

WANTED

VERDIE HALLUM, with aliases: **JAMES BARTON**, **V. H. HALLUMS**, **VERDIE HALLUMS**, **VERDIE HALLUMS**.

DESCRIPTION

Age, 26 years (born November 21, 1914, at Anderson, South Carolina); Height, 5 feet 10 inches; Weight, 153 pounds; Race, Negro; Complexion, dark brown; Hair, black and kinky; Build, medium; Eyes, brown; Marital status, single; Education, fourth grade; Occupation, kitchen helper, waiter and laborer.

CRIMINAL RECORD

As Verdie Hallums, No. 1832, arrested by Sheriff's Office, Asheville, North Carolina, November 23, 1932; charge, disorderly conduct; disposition, paid Court costs, released.

A complaint was filed before a United States Commissioner at Asheville, North Carolina, on December 16, 1939, charging Verdie Hallum with a violation of the Unlawful Flight to Avoid Prosecution Statute, in that he did on or about the twelfth day of October, 1939, at Asheville, North Carolina, unlawfully, wilfully, feloniously, and premeditatedly kill and murder one Juanita Tuit, and immediately thereupon did move and travel in interstate commerce from Asheville, North Carolina, into another jurisdiction out of said State with intent to avoid prosecution for said murder and felony.

Law enforcement agencies kindly transmit any additional information or criminal record to the nearest division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice.

If apprehended, please notify the Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice, Washington, D. C., or the Special Agent in Charge of the division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation listed on the back hereof, which is nearest your city.



NATIONAL MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT ACT

WANTED

JOSEPH GIDA, with aliases: JOSEPH GEIDA.
JOSEPH GEDA, "RIP."

DESCRIPTION

Age, 33 years (born September 2, 1898, at Chicago, Illinois); Height, 5 feet, 7 inches; weight, 160 pounds; Eyes, medium chestnut; Hair, medium dark chestnut; Complexion, fair; Build, medium slender; Race, white; Nationality, American (Slavish extraction); Education, grammar school; Occupation, laborer, millwright; Scars and marks, scar base of left thumb front, burn scar rear of right hand, oblique cut upper lip.



CRIMINAL RECORD

As Joseph Gida, No. C-11631, arrested Police Department, Chicago, Illinois, May 23, 1928, charges larceny, rape, robbery with gun, assault to rob, kidnaping; disposition, August 22, 1928, on plea of guilty sentenced one to ten years on larceny charge; other charges stricken with leave to reinstate.

As Joseph Gida, No. A-7457, received State Reformatory, Pontiac, Illinois, September 6, 1928; crime, larceny; sentence, one to ten years; disposition, released on parole December 15, 1933; discharged December 6, 1934.

* As Joseph Gida, No. C-80788, arrested Police Department, Chicago, Illinois, May 7, 1937; charge, general principles; disposition, dismissed.

An indictment was returned by a Federal Grand Jury on February 15, 1940, at Fort Wayne, Indiana, charging subject as Joseph Gida, with a violation of the National Motor Vehicle Theft Act in that he did on or about August 31, 1938, unlawfully steal and transport an automobile in interstate commerce from East Chicago, Indiana, to Calumet City, Illinois.

* Represents notation unsupported by fingerprints.

NATIONAL MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT ACT

WANTED

NATHAN CLYDE GOODPASTURE, with aliases: CHARLES CLARK, CHARLES F. CLARK, CHARLES CLARKE, R. C. GOODALL, R. V. GOODALL, R. E. GOODDELL, R. A. GOODDELL, R. E. GOODDELL, R. V. GOODDELL, RALPH E. GOODDELL, RALPH EDGAR GOODDELL, N. C. GOODPASTER, N. C. GOODPASTURE, NATHAN GOODPASTURE, NATHAN C. GOODPASTURE, H. E. WHITNEY.

DESCRIPTION

Age, 62 years (born May 15, 1879, at Auburn, Illinois); Height, 5 feet, 8 1/4 inches; Weight, 145 pounds; Eyes, blue-gray; Glasses, wears glasses; Hair, dark chestnut, streaked with gray; thin in front; Mustache, small, black; Complexion, swarthy; Build, medium; Race, white; Nationality, American (Scotch-Irish descent); Education, high school; Occupation, Auto mechanic, salesman, shoe clerk, auto salesman, osteopath, manufacturer's agent—interested in patenting his invention, "Chemo-Electric Applierator"; Penitentiary, husky voice; high cheek bones; eyes twitchy; very nervous; Scars and



marks, horizontal scar, 1 1/4 inch outer joint second finger front; 1/4 inch irregular scar left side of chin; burn scar 1/4 inch left hand; faint cut scars left jaw, left cheek and nose.

CRIMINAL RECORD

As N. C. Goodpasture, No. 397, arrested Police Department, Joplin, Missouri, October 9, 1915; charge grand larceny; disposition, released October 9, 1915, to Police Department, Kansas City, Missouri.

As Nathan C. Goodpasture, No. 7189, arrested Police Department, Kansas City, Missouri, October 9, 1915; charge, investigation, grand larceny; disposition, two years State Penitentiary.

As N. C. Goodpasture, No. 17497, received State Penitentiary, Jefferson City, Missouri, December 17, 1915; crime, grand larceny; sentence two years.

As H. E. Whitney, No. —, arrested Sheriff's Office, Boise, Idaho, March 17, 1926; charge, obtaining money under false pretenses; disposition, released April 21, 1927, and case dismissed.

As Ralph E. Goodell, No. 41836, arrested Police Department, San Francisco, California, October 25, 1928; charge, violation Section No. 3, State Revolver Law—Fugitive, St. Paul, Minnesota; disposition, released to Sheriff's Office, Los Angeles, California, October 25, 1928.

As Ralph E. Goodell, No. 102893, arrested Sheriff's Office, Los Angeles, California, October 31, 1928; charge, grand larceny; disposition, released to Sheriff's Office, St. Paul, Minnesota, November 5, 1928.

* As Charles F. Clark, No. —, arrested Sheriff's Office, St. Paul, Minnesota, November 9, 1928; charge, grand larceny, second and prior conviction; disposition, sentence ten years.

As Charles F. Clark, No. 9505, received State Prison, Stillwater, Minnesota, December 6, 1928; crime, grand larceny 2nd and prior conviction; sentence 10 years; released January 5, 1932.

As R. E. Goodell, No. 9138, arrested Police Department, Des Moines, Iowa, February 29, 1932; charge, bad checks; disposition, dismissed on payment of costs, March 3, 1932.

As Nathan Clyde Goodpasture, No. 6154, arrested Police Department, Peoria, Illinois, August 18, 1932; charge, burglary and larceny; disposition, released to Police Department, Springfield, Illinois.

As Nathan C. Goodpasture, No. 5312, arrested Police Department, Springfield, Illinois, August 18, 1932; charge, burglary and larceny; disposition, 1 to 10 years Southern State Penitentiary, Menard, Illinois.

As Nathan Goodpasture, No. 10664, received Southern State Penitentiary, Menard, Illinois, October 19, 1932; crime, larceny; sentence, 1 to 10 years, discharged January 18, 1939.

As Ralph Edgar Goodell, No. 21948, arrested Police Department, Denver, Colorado, August 13, 1939; charge, investigation—aggravated robbery; disposition, sentenced 30 days county jail, released September 10, 1939.

* Represents notation unsupported by fingerprints.

ASSAULT

WANTED

JAMES GARFIELD CAMP, with aliases:
GARFIELD CAMP, GARFIELD KAMP.

DESCRIPTION

Age, 29 years (born December 19, 1911, Arlington, Virginia); Height, 5 feet 6 inches; Weight, 146 pounds; Eyes, brown; Hair, black, straight; Complexion, brown; Build, stocky; Race, negro; Nationality, American; Education, grade school; Occupation, laborer; Scars and marks, burn scar on left side of face about 3 inches long which tends to distort face; horizontal scar $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches long on front and right side of neck; Peculiarities, walks with limp due to improperly healed broken leg.



CRIMINAL RECORD

* As Garfield Camp, No. —, arrested County Authorities, Albemarle County, Virginia; charge, assault; disposition, 6 years, sent to State Penitentiary, April 16, 1936.

As Garfield Kamp, No. 35581, received State Penitentiary, Richmond, Virginia, April 10, 1938; crime, assault; sentence, 5 years, discharged April 4, 1939.

As James Garfield Camp, No. 349, arrested Police Department, Charlottesville, Virginia, October 23, 1939; charge, carrying concealed weapons and holdup with pistol; disposition, \$25.00 for carrying concealed weapons, escaped October 30, 1939, before disposition as to holdup.

A complaint was filed before the United States Commissioner at Charlottesville, Virginia, on January 23, 1940, charging James Garfield Camp with a violation of the Unlawful Flight to Avoid Prosecution statute in that he did on or about October 30, 1939, flee from Charlottesville, Virginia, to Spartanburg, South Carolina, to avoid prosecution at Charlottesville, Virginia, for felonious assault with a dangerous weapon.

* Represents notation unsupported by fingerprints.

MURDER

WANTED

WILLIAM BOMMARITO, with aliases: JOE BOMMARITO, JOSEPH BOMMARITO, VITO BOMMARITO, WILLIAM BOMMARITO, WILLIAM BOMMIRATO, WILLIAM BOMMORITO, WILLIAM FRANCEL, WILLIAM FRANCELLE.

DESCRIPTION

Age, 37 years (born September 4, 1903, Detroit, Michigan); Height, 5 feet 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches; Weight, 173 pounds; Eyes, medium dark hazel; Hair, dark chestnut; Complexion, medium dark; Build, muscular; Race, white; Nationality, American (Italian extraction); Occupation, golf professional; Scars and marks, faint horizontal scar of $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch about 2 inches above base of left thumb; 1 inch scar at outer corner of left eye; large brown spot between shoulders; Characteristics, extremely fond of golf and frequent golf tournaments; walks with head down and shoulders stooped.



CRIMINAL RECORD

* As William Bommarito, No. —, arrested Police Department, Detroit, Michigan, February 16, 1928; charge, armed robbery; disposition, dismissed February 18, 1928.

* As William Francel, No. —, arrested Police Department, Detroit, Michigan, October 12, 1931; charge, violation of National Prohibition Act; disposition, released to Bureau of Prohibition, Detroit, Michigan, October 12, 1931.

As William Francel, No. D-114, arrested Bureau of Prohibition, Detroit, Michigan, October 12, 1931; charge, violation of National Prohibition Act; disposition, 3 months, House of Correction.

As William Francel, No. 2683, arrested United States Marshal, Detroit, Michigan, October 13, 1931; charge, violation National Prohibition Act; disposition, 2 months, House of Correction.

* As William Francel, No. 55353, received Detroit House of Correction, Northville, Michigan, November 25, 1931; crime, violation of National Prohibition Act; sentence, 2 months; released December 23, 1931, upon taking pauper's oath.

As William Bommarito, No. ME-918, arrested Alcohol Tax Unit, Detroit, Michigan, August 29, 1936; charge, violation of Internal Revenue Law; disposition, released to U. S. Marshal.

As William Bommarito, No. 8571, arrested United States Marshal, Detroit, Michigan, August 29, 1936; charge, violation of Internal Revenue Law; disposition, sentenced to 16 months in U. S. Penitentiary, Leavenworth, Kansas.

As William Bommarito, No. 4038, received United States Detention Farm, Milan, Michigan, January 15, 1937; crime, violation of Internal Revenue Law; sentence, 16 months, U. S. Penitentiary, Leavenworth, Kansas.

As William Bommarito, No. 59415, received United States Penitentiary, Leavenworth, Kansas, January 29, 1937; crime, violation Internal Revenue Law; sentence, 16 months; released on parole September 3, 1937.

A complaint was filed before the United States Commissioner at Detroit, Michigan, on August 29, 1938, charging William Bommarito with a violation of the Unlawful Flight to Avoid Prosecution Statute in that he did unlawfully flee from Detroit, Michigan, to Boston, Massachusetts, to avoid prosecution at Detroit, Michigan, for the crime of murder.

* Represents notation unsupported by fingerprints.

Presenting The Author

ON THE way to school I found the whole gang milling excitedly in the alley behind a house just being built. They said there was a ghost in it; claimed they had seen it, big as a man and all white. I knew ghosts appeared only at night, usually when you played too long and had to get the coal and kindling in after dark, and to prove it went up to the house.

I couldn't see anything inside or out except freshly plastered walls. It was as I was leaving that it happened. I heard a noise behind me, turned and there was the ghost, all in white just as they had said and big as a hull elephant.

I left the porch like a P-38 taking off, even if there wasn't such a thing in those days, and went down the alley yelling "mama" at the top of my voice, the ghost grunting like a wampus right behind me. I slipped through a crack in the gate just as the ghost hit it almost taking off the hinges. Granny had come out to see who was getting murdered and I hid behind her while she stopped the ghost with a clothes line pole.

The ghost turned out to be a plasterer who thought I'd been stealing his lumber. Granny and the clothes line pole convinced him that it was all a mistake and I was sent on to school. But it was hours before I calmed down.

Later, after my hair got so it would lay down without plastering, I showed my hent was writing by putting it all down on paper and sending it to the American Boy. That was the most exciting thing to ever happen to me. Today when I want to get terror in my stories I try to recall how I felt going down that alley. The editor, however, said it was not exciting enough so I had to turn to fiction to make good and to make sure it is going to be exciting enough I always add a murder.

I was horn in Ogden, Utah, where my father was agent for the Pullman Company. He died and I left high school in my second year to go to work for the railroad. I've been working for

transportation companies most of the time since, holding down jobs in San Francisco, Stockton, Modesto, Whittier and Long Beach, California.

I was in the navy during the last war, graduating from Great Lakes as a seaman and going on the U.S.S. Kansas. I made two trips to Spain and Italy as a gunner aboard the S.S. Westwind, a merchant ship carrying ammunition to Italy. I spent some months in Genoa and Spezia, getting to know the Italians well enough to believe that if we help them throw Mussolini and his gang out on their ears we'll be doing them the greatest personal favor possible.



C. S. Wallace

After the armistice I made three trips to France aboard the troopship Princess Matoika. Aboard her I got out of a lot of work by joining the wrestling team. Ogden was the home of two of the world's finest wrestlers. Jack Harbertson, middleweight and Mike Yokel, welterweight. I learned a lot of tricks training with them although I was too light to be anything but an amateur. On no job anywhere have I ever received the consideration or been offered the opportunities that I got in the navy. It makes me sad to think I didn't have sense enough to stay in and can't pass the physical now to get

back into the ocean-going service.

For a while I was assistant agent and night dispatcher for the Pacific Greyhound at Modesto, California, and it was here that MURDER EN-ROUTE really began. One of our busses got stuck in the snow for several days. Dusty Haven, who first appeared in WESTBOUND MURDER, a runner-up in the last Mary Roberts Rinehart contest, was suggested by my brother. He has made more trips across the country than any other driver. A lot of incidents in these stories actually happened. Guess which.

Editor's note: Mr. Wallace's concluding paragraph presents evidence that the best story is written around a subject familiar to the author.

the READER'S VERDICT



OPINION FROM IOWA

Sirs:

I have read two of your magazines and think they're tops, except for the first story which is too long. I like Wilbur Peddie, and the two cops in the "Whip of Death," best. "Dead Dog's Dividend" was swell; it had just the right amount of romance in it. "Capture" was too long and awfully dry. After those mentioned, the following were best: "With the Weapons at Hand," "Death Stalks by Night," "The Corpse That Talked," "Old King Kill," "Death and the Little Daisy," "O'Sheen Is Best Man," and that's all. I didn't like "Headed for Nowhere," or "Case of the Well-Cleansed Corpse."

This is my opinion of your magazine. I hope more of the stories will be the size of the "Dead Dog's Dividend" and have the same amount of romance.

CHARLES WOLFORD
116 East Pine Street
Iowa Falls, Iowa

We've eliminated the full length novel this issue in order to learn if our readers prefer a larger number of stories . . . You're going to find



"Just a minute, buddy. I'll be right wit' chal"

more and more of the top-flight detective story authors in future issues.—Ed.

A NEW READER REPORTS

Sirs:

The January issue is the first MAMMOTH DETECTIVE I have bought. But now I intend to get it as often as it comes out.

"Incredible Ink" was the best. Wilbur Peddie is quite a character.

And as for Hank Fletcher—well, I'm a fat person and I don't care for too much exercise either, but I must say, I certainly wish my brain worked like his.

I also liked very much, "Death Stalks by Night," "Case of the Well-Cleansed Corpse," and "Dead Dog's Dividend." The rest were good, but those were the best.

"Capture" was good also, but if I weren't a fast reader, it would have taken me a month to finish it.

MRS. PHYLLIS GILPATRICK
Limerick, Me.

Sorry we can't give you either of the two characters in this issue, whom you liked most. But we're sure that among the eighteen stories in this issue are some that will make up for the absence of the two you selected. Write to us again; for we like particularly to hear from feminine readers.—Ed.

FRIEDMAN MAKES GOOD

Sirs:

I wish to give you my opinion on the two stories by your amateur writers Stuart Friedman and Yerxa. Presumably you favor the latter, inasmuch as you ran a page of his autobiography. Nevertheless, I think Mr. Friedman has made more effort to give us something new. The whole setup in "Well Cleansed Corpse" was somewhat novel, and this story has been very well plotted, making use of more than a few fresh twists, and despite a down-to-business way of telling the story, makes use of little human touches. After the murder was solved, and a too smart method it was, there is yet interest and an extremely satisfying last paragraph that left me with a chuckle. Truthfully, I considered the Friedman story better written in some ways than some of my favorite old timers. I always like your Nelson

Bond, and Shaftel and Stewart Sterling. This skip-tracer series by Howard Browne seems to have become very popular. I hope the writer continues to carry his audience, because he does a nice job with a none too colorful character.

If there is anything I dislike it is the hackneyed old-old plots. Please try to keep them out. As you yourself have found, there is new blood—like Friedman. I truly believe it is a tonic to the professionals themselves to read the new men.

Whereas some of the established ones are sometimes inclined to rest on their laurels, and produce a lot of repetitions of stories which we fans have read time and again, the new ones, apparently, strive for the unusual. No doubt this is necessary for beginners in meeting the competition.

Let's not have the articles overrun MAMMOTH DETECTIVE. Those you have used have been quite interesting, but let's hope you'll always keep it a predominantly fiction magazine. If we want so called true detective cases we can read them in the papers. I enthusiastically admire the "spinner of tales." There is nothing like good fiction, and no fiction quite as stimulating as clever detective stories.

So let's have more of the best in the field. My favorite lengths are the short ones and a few novelets. And keep up the variety in themes and plots. I've strayed from my original point. I repeat, the new ones deserve a big hand for nice jobs.

MRS. J. C. MURNAN
2839 Hampton Ave.,
St. Louis, Mo.

Your praise of Friedman's story is echoed by several of our readers. Which pleases us probably as much as it does him. We've a strong hunch he'll be back in these pages soon. Nelson Bond is back again in this issue. Your letter is intelligent and interesting and we'd like to hear from you again.—Ed.

A FAN LOOKS AT AUTHORS

Sirs:

I want to register myself as a fan for your new (anyway, to me it is new) magazine. Goodness, no one could ask for a bigger and better publication. My very first act when I get some new magazine is to look at the editorial chats, which I believe all magazines should have, for with me at least it makes me feel right at home, and as though I knew the publishers, and what they stand for in their fiction. I like *Off The Blotter*, and *The Reader's Verdict*. I am very happy to comply with your request to give my humble opinion on the two newcomers' stories. I really agree with you that these men deserve to be right up there with the older professional ones, for their stories were most entertaining.

I am afraid I must decide on Stuart Friedman's Case of the Well Cleansed Corpse, however, though do not take it as a slight for Mr. Yerna's

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nice little piece. In the Friedman story there is one thing in particular that decides my vote. It is the originality in the use of the post card. My! I wouldn't wonder if such a thing as that couldn't really happen. And I feel that the alibi that the sneaking little Krabbick used was good. It was a very hard thing to believe that fuses could be made to go off like that (or perhaps that is a technical matter in which I am wrong) and the author's mentioning earlier that the little killer worked in a Time Bomb plant somehow made it seem real, anyway. You just had the feeling that this might sound illogical if someone just told you about it, but in the story it didn't, and the more I think about it, in fact, I can see how it would be possible. Mr. Friedman has a nice sense of humor in two places—when the awfully tough guy inspector circled around him, trying to get his goat, and the hero acted like he was admiring his suit. But what we all thought was funny (our family read both these stories, and decided on it at lunch) was the hero taking the redhead girl home and spurning her so subtly with "We'd hate ourselves in the morning—" That was really good writing.

Our family is interested in a magazine like yours that gives new people a chance to appear in print. I hope our vote will help you in deciding to continue your policy of letting the new writers in. Let us see more by both the "amateurs," Yerxa and Friedman. We don't want to turn thumbs down on Yerxa just because we chose the other story. Perhaps it was that his was so short his plot couldn't be worked out as much. By the way, we bet among ourselves, and would like you to settle it: Isn't this Friedman really a radio script writer? Some think he just happened to use radio writing as a part of his plot, but brother and I think he follows the advice to new writers in fiction, to WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT.

Congratulations on a good magazine. We'll settle down now and read the longer ones. I'm sure they'll be all we expect—Oh yes, the illustrations and cover were done by real artists.

ADELINE ARNOLD
 372 Cloverdale
 Akron, Ohio

Your letter shows unusual ability to weigh merit in stories. When we can please readers so discriminating, we feel pretty proud of a task well done . . . So far as we know, Friedman has done no radio writing.—En.

MEDAL FROM A READER

Sirs:

Enclosed find a medal for the first three editions of a swell detective magazine. I've read a lot of "whodunits" in my day, and some of the best appeared in your pages.

Beyond any doubt your best stories are the Wilbur Peddie series. That little guy gets more real with every adventure. Keep him stumbling over corpses!

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Roses to Hank Fletcher, his stooge and their patrol car. The fat boy is one of the brainiest characters I've come across in a long time.

Stewart Sterling's yarn took third honors. I'd like to see more adventures of that hotel dick.

Friedman, Shaftel and Hasse tied for fourth place, with Yerxa's short close behind. I'd like to see a longer story by Yerxa, incidentally.

The rest of the stories were good without being exceptional. Frankly, I was disappointed in Bond's yarn; he's done much better many times.

You'll hear from me again, gentlemen.

GEORGE L. MILLER
2712 Orange Grove
Los Angeles, Cal.

Thanks for the medal, George. We'll wear it next to the ones we won in the Civil War! Sorry we couldn't give you Wilbur Peddie and Hank Fletcher in this issue, but we're confident they'll be back. Bond's story this time is quite good, we think.—Ed.

PLEA FOR HOME-GROWN AUTHORS

Sirs:

For Pete's sake, do you have to use an English author for your long story? I like the English, all right, but I sure don't like the way they tell stories. Give us Gardner, or Fair or Gruber—boys who know how to tell a fast-moving story with plenty of plot.

The best writers in the first three issues were Blade, McGivern, Browne and Sterling. The others were all right, too, but those were the best. Why doesn't McGivern give us some more about Geoffery O'Neil? I liked that guy.

And why don't you guys put out your mag once a month? This business of waiting two or three months for the top detective magazine on the market isn't to my liking. And I'll bet a lot of other readers feel the same way.

MILTON SILENSKI
4844 Northland Ave.,
St. Louis, Mo.

As you will notice, there is no full-length novel this time. Let us know what you think of the change. And we rate many of our present authors as equal to those you name. Are we wrong?—Ed.

AGAIN—FRIEDMAN!

Sirs:

You guys sure hit the jackpot with this fellow Friedman. That guy sure has got some imagination; he has the kind of line we like out here at the Plant. Lots of the fellows think his stuff is tops. We exchange magazines, and now when we talk over the different stories, his lingo comes up lots of times. Why don't you give us a long one by him? He sure fools you right up to the end.

CHARLES SEYMOUR
724 Blake Street
Indianapolis, Ind.

Which seems to settle Mr. Friedman's future—at least as far as Indianapolis is concerned!—Ed.

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COMMENDABLE

Sirs:

I was very much intrigued with the story by Stuart Friedman. I like this writer very much. He combines very interesting people with extremely clever situations. I notice him and many other of your writers in other books. There is Shaftel who is quite good, and Stewart Sterling is excellent. Robert Leslie Bellem is also one of my favorites. You seem to choose the better efforts of the better writers, and a commendable publication is the happy result.

MRS. LILLIAN KNIGHT,
2503 Mansfield Ave.,
Drexel Hills, Pa.

We are fortunate in being given first chance on stories written by some of the top names in the detective field. Every yarn that goes into our pages must measure up to what we believe is a high standard. And the readers are quick to notice this, and equally quick to comment.—Ed.

LIKES PICTURE CRIMES

Sirs:

I have just finished the last issue of MAMMOTH DETECTIVE and am very much pleased with its stories. It is the first issue I have read but I hope to read more. I have read other detective magazines but they do not compare with this.

I am going to send a copy to my brother in the Armed Forces, and I am sure he will also enjoy it.

I must compliment you on the pictures on both the front and back covers; and I like your idea of the picture crime for the readers to solve.

ROBERT JORGENSEN,
214 Mill Street,
Owatonna, Minn.

Thank you for your kind words, Robert. Since you like picture crimes, try your deductive powers on the back cover mystery in this issue. This will be a regular feature, as so many readers have given it favorable mention.—Ed.

WANTS CRIME TERMS EXPLAINED

Sirs:

Just finished your September issue and would like to compliment you for the best detective magazine I have ever read. I have not been reading detective magazines very long and was surprised at the quantity and quality of your magazine. Most ten and fifteen cent magazines have about two or three good stories. But I can't help but read MAMMOTH DETECTIVE from cover to cover.

You said in *Off the Blotter*, if we have any suggestions to make, to send them in. I have one. Many persons, like myself, may have just begun reading detective stories, and do not know all the criminal terms and the sentences given for certain crimes. I suggest you make a vocabulary of criminal terms, crimes and punishment for each.

BRUCE MAGUIRE,
Camp Lafitte,
Lafitte, La.

Your suggestion is gratefully acknowledged, Bruce. It has been turned over to one of our authors with a request to do something about it. Some of these bits of information are scattered through every issue of MAMMOTH DETECTIVE. Watch for them.—Ed.

DETAILED REPORT

Sirs:

After reading the first three issues of MAMMOTH DETECTIVE, I feel it my duty to compile a report on all stories you have so far presented. As a bedridden invalid, I can do little except read to occupy my time. My favorite literature is good detective fiction; and the best I've found so far, in magazines, is in yours.

Now for the reports:

Your best authors are Alexander Blade, Howard Browne and George Armin Shaftel. Others almost as good are Robert Leslie Bellem, William P. McGivern (I've read his stories in Amazing Stories and Fantastic Adventures, and liked them), Nelson Bond and Henry Hasse.

Stories in the order of their excellence:

1. "Keep Your Eye On It." The best story of a remarkable series. I like the absence of gangsters and guns and one-way rides and all the other hokum so often found in so-called detective stories.
2. "Case of the Living Mummy." Stuffed with excitement and plot. The fat policeman and his pal give me a lot of enjoyment.
3. "Through Murder's Eyes." Another story in which straight thinking replaces "bang-hang" hokum. The characters were believable humans.
4. "Old King Kill." January issue
5. "Secret of the Goldfish Bowl." May issue.
6. "Case of the Well-Cleansed Corpse." January issue.
7. "O'Sheen Is Best Man." January issue. A short-short, but beautifully handled.
8. "Homicide Call" September issue.
9. "Dead Dog's Dividend." January issue. Some "corn" but very exciting, too.
10. "No Questions." May issue.

There were a lot of other good stories; in fact, in all three magazines, I know of only two or three stories I did not like. As for the Wyndham Martyn novels, I, for one, think you can do without them very, very well.

MARTIN WOLD,
1217 DuBois,
New Orleans, La.

We appreciate the trouble and time you've given in analyzing our first three issues of MAMMOTH DETECTIVE. Editors, as we've said before, attach a great deal of importance to the remarks of readers. And when authors pick up magazines in which their stories appear, they first turn to the Reader's Verdict, read the comment therein and attempt to guide their future work accordingly.—Ed.

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LIKES ARTICLES

Sirs:

I've asked my druggist to reserve a copy of each issue of your magazine for me each month. Not only because it contains some darned good stories, but for the true articles and little short bits of information mixed throughout the pages. I'd like to see a series on famous detectives, such as Alan Pinkerton, J. R. Drummond and William J. Flynn.

Your stories are swell. I particularly liked Stuart Friedman's "Case of the Well-cleansed Corpse," and Howard Browne's "Incredible Ink." Nelson Bond's story, "Death Stalks by Night," was far below his usual standard.

CLINTON S. ALBRIGHT,
Hotel Rome,
Omaha, Nebraska.

Your suggestion regarding famous detectives is a sound one, and we'll give it thought. And if you like short articles and features, just take note of the number in this issue!—Ed.

COVERS IMPRESS HIM

Sirs:

Don't ever let any artist other than Robert Gibson Jones do the covers for MAMMOTH DETECTIVE. The one for January was aces, tops, fine, the best! Your best inside artists are McCauley, Ruth Smith and Fuqua.

I liked the "Whip Of Death" best, with "Dead Dog's Dividend" and "Incredible Ink" close behind. I did not like "Death and the Little Daisy." Martyn's long story was pretty good but awfully dry in spots. I'd like to see more cartoons.

JOHN KIRKPATRICK,
3490 Sewell,
Cleveland, Ohio.

Thus far, no one shows any sign of displacing Jones on our covers. We think the one on this issue is his best to date. . . . Cartoons, frankly, are a problem; many are submitted, but few are chosen. The other artists you mention appear regularly in MAMMOTH's sister publications: AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES.—Ed.

WE MAKE THE GRADE

Sirs:

Your January book was the best yet! Illustrations, both interiors and covers, were darn near perfect. The stories I would grade as follows:

"Capture." 70%. Moved too slowly for my taste.

"Incredible Ink." 95%. Equals the others of the series.

"Dead Dog's Dividend." 95%. Swell action and characters.

"With the Weapons at Hand." 90%. Shaftel is always good.

"Death Stalks by Night." 90%. Kept me well-chilled.

"The Corpse that Talked." 85%. Very good, for a new writer.

"Headed for Ascare." 85%. Nice, human-interest yarn.

"Follow the Bouncing Check." 50%. Left me cold.

"Case of the Well-Cleansed Corpse." 90%. This guy Friedman is a plenty slick writer.

"Old King Kill." 90%. Here's a character I'd like to read more about.

"Death and the Little Daisy." 75%. All right. That's all; just "all right."

"O'Sheen is Best Man." 90%. A gem!

"The Whip of Death." 95%. Not as good as the first about the two cops, but still plenty good. And that is that!

JONAS LORIMER,
2205 N. Western Ave.,
Chicago, Ill.

Which ends the Readers' Verdict for this month.
—Ed.

UNTRUE—BUT WHY?

(See Page 274)

SO, DO they broadcast the description of those tires? No. They grab the obliging witness, and question him, wanting to discover his motive for giving them misleading evidence. That is what he has done. Remember, the car rushed straight past him. Yet, he says he examined the tread imprints of the tires on the moist roadway. The catch to it is that only *two*—not four—tire marks would be discernible. For the rear tires only leave traces on the straightaway. The rear tires imprints cover the front tires marks.

* * *

POLICE radios are "locked" in tune to their own police broadcasting station. Even if the prowler car driver was tempted to tune in on a prize fight or Charlie McCarthy, chances are that he could not.

* * *

HUH-UH; nix; not by a jug-ful. A convict on parole must have a job waiting for him before he is released—and he cannot take a job handling money. He cannot (legally) drive a car. He cannot go out of the state. He cannot marry. Detective O'Reilly would not congratulate Lefty: O'Reilly would drag him back to the hoosegow.

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PERSONALS

Information wanted regarding the present address of Milton N. Cross, who, until March 8, 1940, was employed as a steamfitter by the B. L. Richardson Company of Detroit, Michigan. Forward all information to Attorney Martin W. Dodge, c/o this magazine.

* * *

Peter J. N. Silas has returned and wants to hear from you. He has news regarding your investment in the *Little Hope*. Write to him in care of me. *Paul N.*

* * *

Verrie Fanton, who formerly lived at 12th and K streets, and then across from the University of Nebraska Agricultural College, in Lincoln, Nebraska, please write to your old friend, H. B. Carleton, in care of this magazine. Understand you are now in Estes Park, Colorado.

* * *

Victor L. Moncreif. I am holding all mail, as you requested. Please furnish forwarding address at once, or I shall be forced to return it. *Mollie.*

* * *

Relatives of Samuel V. McKenzie, deceased, are asked to communicate with Attorney Martin W. Dodge, in care of this magazine. He operated a filling station in Salem, Oregon, from 1927 until August, 1939. Prior to 1927, he was employed as a mechanic in Pontiac, Michigan.

* * *

Robert Armbruster. It is imperative that your mother hear from you immediately. She has been in steadily failing health since you left home. Your father assures me that nothing will be said regarding the Forbes matter. *Dr. Ralph S. Burton.*

* * *

R. M. B. Very important that you tell me where Bunney is. Impossible to take care of financial details where I am now. All of my letters to Bunney at the old address have been returned marked "not here." Her attitude is not justified. The money belongs to Mother, and is rightfully hers. I know it is impossible for you to handle the matter, but at least send me the address so that Mother's attorney can settle things. *John K.*

* * *

Arthur Shellman, age about forty-four, height six feet, blue eyes and brown hair. Last known address was New York City in 1919, where he was studying cartooning and illustrating. Was a member of the United States Navy during the first World War. Please send any information regarding him to his niece, Mrs. O. C. Maxwell, 1420 East 6th Street, Reno, Nevada.

* * *

Babs M. George has agreed to pay all bills. Only condition is that you be willing to start over again. Both Mary and I urge you to accept. *Vincent L.*

Constance CORNER

Robert Kalanja, 421 Duquesne Ave., Trafford, Pa., has coins, stamps, books, fossils, chemicals and scientific equipment, Indian relics and magazines to trade for books, fiction or science. He would also like to correspond with boys and girls between the ages of 17 and 20 . . . Anyone interested in psychic research write to Charles Miller, 202 E. 115 Street, New York City, or to Bill Caple, 412 N. School, Los Angeles, Calif., and he will receive a copy of "Psychical Research" free. Just enclose a three cent stamp for mailing. Paper contains articles on Spiritualism, Telepathy, Clairvoyance, Etc. . . Elizabeth King, 722 Forest, Ann Arbor, Mich., would like to write to anyone remotely resembling her idol, Maxie Baer, and who is interested in prize fighting . . . Renée Dunoif, 763 Crown St., Brooklyn, N. Y., 17 years old, would like to correspond with young men. She enjoys sports, dancing, and reading . . . Tom Arnold, 1700 Hickory St., Texarkana, Ark., would like to play corresponding chess with anyone interested. He would also like to sell a silent home movie machine, films, an almost new photography set worth \$10.00, and a complete set of Jerry Todd Books . . . Lucille Kraft, age 15, R.F.D. 5, Allegan, Michigan, would like to correspond with boys and girls her age or older . . . Eddy Morilla, Gervasio 10F, Havana, Cuba, age 17, wants young pen pals anywhere, interested in everything. Write in Spanish, English, French, Portuguese or Esperanto. Immediate answers . . . Mary Senchiesen, 33rd St. Michaels Ave., Stratford, Conn., would like to correspond with men in service. She is 23 years old . . . Corp. Eli A. Homza, Company "G," Fifteenth Signal Service Regiment, Fort Monmouth, N. J., wants girl pen pals for correspondence . . . Shirley Beckers, Route No. 2, Allegan, Mich., would like to correspond with anyone from 16 to 22, especially anyone in the armed service . . . Ann Malisek, 286 Beach St., Bridgeport, Conn., 16 years old, would like young men in the service to write to her . . . George C. Bump, 4116 Terrace St., Oakland, Calif., wants pen pals . . . Rita Miller, 2671½ W 9th St., Los Angeles, Calif., 17 years old, has black hair, brown eyes and is five foot six and a half inches tall. Her hobbies are motorcycle riding, swimming, and would especially like to hear from boys who own motorcycles . . . Mrs. Constance Jeffers, General Delivery, Tonopah, Nevada, a lonely army wife, 21 years of age, is in a strange state and knows no one. Would like to hear from girls her own age or other army wives. Likes writing letters, dancing, and is a candid camera fan . . . Lucile Sharkey, 5937 Newport, Detroit, Mich., 19 years old. Would enjoy hearing from service boys, also boys and girls between the ages of 18-24 . . . John Schomburg, Jr., 41 George St., Pearl River, N. Y., is 16 years old, and a student in high school. Is interested in aviation, STF, and science. Wants to contact boys or girls interested in these same things.

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"I KILLED THIS MAN!"

By ROBERT FORDNEY

Here is the story behind the picture crime presented on the back cover. Did you figure it out this way?

MOST showgirls are a pretty swell lot; and Peaches was probably the swellest of them all. You see, I know, because I know Peaches—and I knew how much she thought of that poor girl who shared their tiny room just around the corner from the theatre.

Alice was always in a jam. Maybe because she was the kind of a girl who didn't use too much sound reasoning before she let herself go with her emotions. Sweet kid, and all that, and Peaches loved her like a sister. Whenever Alice got into trouble, from money to "fronting" for the benefit of the folks from home when they visited, Peaches was always in there pitching.

Alice had a lot of nice things that Peaches didn't, though. Clothes—plenty of 'em . . . and swell rags too! That's where most of the trouble came in. You see, Alice had a sugar daddy. A rich old galoot by the name of Carstairs. A banker, or something like that. You know the type—bald pate in the front row?

Well, you can imagine the shock that hit Peaches right in the face when she walked into second-childhood's parlor intending to tell him off, for Alice's sake, and found him slumped in his chair deadlier than a doornail! And Peaches had seen Alice go out of there, white as a sheet only a few minutes before!

That's why Peaches had gone in. She figured the old boy was finally giving her the brush off—he'd been trying to for a couple of weeks.

Well, there he was, stone dead and sitting peacefully in his chair. Everything else was in apple pie order.

"She killed him!" Peaches said.

Dames are funny. Maybe if Peaches had thought things over a few minutes, she wouldn't have done what she did. But a brilliant idea hit her, and it looked so good to her at first thought she acted on it fast.

She looked around, found a little marble statuette about eighteen inches high. Shuddering a little, she hit the dead man over the head with the base of it. His scalp was cut. But no blood came. Peaches looked at the statuette in despair. She put it down on the table, took her nail file out of her purse, cut her hand until the blood came, then smeared a little on the head end of the statue. Then she mussed up her hair a little, took off her coat and went to the phone. When she got police headquarters, she said:

"Please send a policeman to the home of Mr. Carstairs at 986 Oak. He's dead."

Headquarters sent Reilly.

When he got there, Peaches let him in.

"In there," she indicated the parlor. "It's Mr. Carstairs. I've killed him."

Reilly jumped.

"Killed him!"

He walked swiftly into the parlor and looked at the body.

In a moment he nodded.

"Yeah, he's dead," he said tonelessly. "How'd you do it?"

Peaches managed a sob of terror and brushed her hair out of her eyes. Always was a good actress, that kid, and now she was putting it on with everything she had.

"He grabbed me and kissed me again and again. I broke loose. I was so scared I didn't know what I was doing. I picked up that statuette and hit him over the head. I didn't mean to kill him! I lifted him up and sat him in the chair, but he didn't move! Then I called the police."

Reilly looked around again.

"You are lying!" he said. "Who you trying to protect?"

"I'm not lying," said Peaches stubbornly.

"Oh yes you are. In the first place, you lie when you say he kissed you again and again.

..." Reilly reached out and touched her lips with his finger. It came away red. "You see, your lipstick is all in place. And there's none on Carstairs' lips! Next, how come there's blood on that statuette and none on Carstairs' head? I see you cut your hand. How'd you do that? On a belt buckle or something?"

"And that cut on his head. How could that be caused by that round head on the statuette?"

"Next, I'll give you a job moving pianos if you can lift that guy an inch, much less pick him off the floor and put him in that chair!"

Peaches broke down then and she was really crying. Reilly got it out of her in a few minutes and told her come with him.

"Sorry, sister," he said. "I'll have to hold you. And we'll have your girl friend in no time. I'm afraid she wasn't worth making such a sacrifice for."

Well, they did arrest Alice. But when the coroner examined the body, he found out it was heart failure. Both girls were released. Funny how these dames mess things up, ain't it!

Behind Your Back--

WHAT IS SHE CALLING YOU--

HE-MAN

or Weakling?



BELIEVE it or not—the girls are sizing you up *all day long!* Whether they look at you **TWICE** is up to **YOU!** They *will* if you have a rugged, healthy, big-muscled **HE-MAN** body, glowing with strength and vigor. But they'll just snicker at you behind your back if you're a skinny, no-muscle **WEAKLING!** If **YOU**, too, want to feel those admiring glances right through your back then listen to this:

Let Me Prove I Can Make YOU a NEW MAN— *Charles Atlas*

WILL you give me just 15 minutes a day of your spare time? That's all I need to **PROVE**—regardless of how old or young you are, or how ashamed you may be of your present physique—that I can give you a body men envy and women admire. Biceps that can dish it out, and a muscle-ridged stomach that can take it. A full, deep barrel-chest. Legs that never tire. A tough, sinewy back. An all-around physique that can laugh at **ANY** kind of rough going.

We're **ALL** in the Army today! The heavy war-time demands on strength and endurance are no longer limited to front-line trenches. It's only a matter of time until **EVERY** citizen is called to shoulder his full share of the load. **ALREADY** the Army has enrolled men from 18 to 64. And whether you do your part in Uncle Sam's Services or as a home-front civilian, you've **GOT** to be in 100% **SHAPE**. Every man, young or old, owes it to himself to get a body with the bulking staying power that double shifts of working call for. **HOW DO YOU STACK UP?**

**WOULD YOU BELIEVE I WAS
ONCE A 97-lb. WEAKLING?**

Yes, I **was**—a miserable 97-pound bag of skin and bones. But you'd never believe it to look at me now, would you? Through my discovery of "**Dynamic Tension**" I changed myself into "**The World's Most Perfectly-Developed**

Man." I'm **LIVING PROOF** of the miracles "**Dynamic Tension**" can perform—right in the privacy of your own home! **NOW**—will you give my method 15 minutes a day to get the kind of **HE-MAN** build you have always longed to have?

Write for FREE BOOK

Just a postage stamp will bring you your copy of my famous book, "**Everlasting Health and Strength**," absolutely free. No wonder nearly 2,000,000 men have sent for this big 48-page story of "**Dynamic Tension**"—illustrated with action photos of myself and some of my pupils. You'll not only read about my secret of "**Dynamic Tension**"—but you **SEE PROOF** of it! **CHARLES ATLAS**, Dept. 91, 115 E. 23rd St., New York, N. Y.



**CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 91,
115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.**

I want the proof that your system of "**Dynamic Tension**" will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "**Everlasting Health and Strength**."

Name
(Please print or write plainly)
Address
City State

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Atlas*
An actual wa-
stached photo of
"The World's
Most Perfectly-
Developed Man."

This is a place
holder for the back
cover.